

David Stuart Davies

BENDING THE

WILLOW

*Jeremy Brett
as Sherlock Holmes*

*with a Foreword by Edward Hardwicke
and
a Reminiscence by David Burke*

Calabash Press
Ashcroft, British Columbia
2010

Foreword

IN OCTOBER 1993, during the filming of the last series of *Sherlock Holmes*, an article appeared in *The Independent* headed 'Underrated—The Case of Jeremy Brett's Sherlock Holmes'. Amongst other things in his tribute, Kevin Jackson wrote:

Everything he—Jeremy Brett—does can ultimately be justified by chapter , and line from Conan Doyle's stories but he has taken liberties with the myth so confidently that he has, over the last decade, taken possession of it and displaced the literary Holmes. For me that is the hallmark of great acting: to illuminate a text in a way that the author could not have visualised.

I believe that Kevin Jackson was correct: Jeremy never received the recognition his achievement deserved. David Stuart Davies's book will, I

hope, help to put that right. It is a fine account of the making of the Granada series, and of a complex and much loved actor developing a performance which for many is the definitive Sherlock Holmes. Jeremy's determination to 'get it right', his courage, and his humour are all here, together with the problems his illness created for him, and the effect it had on all of us connected with the series.

Bending the Willow is a wonderful tribute to Jeremy, a very clear and understandable explanation of his illness, and a full, fair portrait of the man. It really does let you see the complexity of his life and his sheer guts and determination.

My association with Jeremy Brett and Sherlock Holmes covers an eight year period. I owe them and Dr Watson a great deal. It was a fascinating time—not always easy, but never dull. More often than not it was most exciting and tremendous fun. You could never forget that you were working with a very special actor, and a very good friend. In spite of his manic depression, Jeremy somehow trained himself to think positively. His determination to get Jeremy Paul's play, *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*, put on in London is proof of that. On his black days he would merely say, 'I am a reluctant hero today'.

The exploration of every aspect of Conan Doyle's creation is caught on these pages, and David's impressive knowledge of the stories gives his book an underlining strength.

I would like to pay tribute to the two producers of the series, Michael Cox and June Wyndham Davies, who made all this possible. It is easy to forget when we push the 'on' button of our TV sets the tremendous work that is involved in preparing and presenting just one hour of television drama. It requires great skill and imagination to create the opportunity and conditions that will allow an actor to give such a memorable performance as Jeremy's, to support and encourage during the darker times, and finally to protect the whole enterprise from the accountants who tend to regard period drama as an unnecessary extravagance.

David Stuart Davies's book is a splendid tribute to them and, of course, Jeremy.

EDWARD HARDWICKE

Normandy, France

June 1996

Remembering Jeremy

I'm sorry that Jeremy is no longer with us. I miss his generous mad-cap spirit and blessed eccentricity. Who else would entertain a lady friend to lunch in the BBC canteen with lighted candles mounted on a branched candelabra, set on a lace tablecloth over a formica-topped table? (All these props brought and set up by Jeremy himself.) He celebrated life on every suitable and unsuitable occasion. I remember with embarrassment a birthday when he insisted on serenading me in full voice in the dining room of a staid Lancashire hotel. He was unabashed at the reactions of the solid berghers around him. Alas, I was never able to match his unflinching *chutzpah*. . . .

... Or his infectious conviviality. He had the ability to be everyone's friend. But it did not come carelessly: he worked at it. He knew not just each individual of the many film crews we worked with, but was genuinely interested in their families and their hobbies. He took snaps of them, and posted them up on a special board. He valued their many and varied skills, and told them so. People respond to that kind of warmth, and respond in kind. It was a happy time for all of us.

Above all, Jeremy was bent on doing justice to the Conan Doyle stories. He was passionate in his determination to be faithful to the originals. He was abetted in this by our producer, Michael Cox, who had the foresight to see that the world-wide confraternity of Sherlock Holmes lovers would not forgive us if we compromised. The reward is that to this day the Granada series is sold and resold the world over—and enjoyed and respected. I suppose one day, somewhere, someone will want to have a go at making a fresh series—and good luck to them! They will be hard put to find a better Holmes than Jeremy.

However, it came at a cost to his private life. For ten years or so Jeremy lived a hotel life in Manchester. I enjoy the occasional stay in a hotel—but

ten years! I suppose it meant that he didn't have to worry about the usual domestic chores: a blessing when he had to get up each day at the crack of dawn to make sure he knew his lines for the day. My workload was minute compared to his. Holmes never stops talking. The public rarely thinks about the effort of memory required—nor should they—but I know it can take hours. I believe the workload eventually cost him his health, physical and mental. When he died he was suffering from a variety of ailments. It would have been difficult for him to work, not least because he would have been impossible to insure. And he had, with the help of Granada TV and Ted Hardwicke, completed his major opus. A Jeremy unable to work in the morning would have been unthinkable. Some kindly spirit up there saw as much, and took him off to celebrate with the angels.

DAVID BURKE

2009

Preface

IN THE WORLD OF FILM, TELEVISION, and theatre there are rare moments when there is a magical yoking together of star to vehicle: a combination which enriches each element and, ultimately, elevates and illuminates both. Without doubt this happened in the early nineteen-eighties when Granada Television in Britain gave producer Michael Cox the opportunity to set up a Sherlock Holmes series and to offer the leading part to Jeremy Brett. Brett became not only the Sherlock Holmes of this generation but also, to many, the definitive impersonator of Arthur Conan Doyle's immortal sleuth. Brett became the man Conan Doyle had created—particularly in the early episodes of the series, before ill health dogged him and hampered his performance—breathing fresh and vigorous life into literature's favourite detective.

Jeremy Brett's sudden death in September 1995 robbed the acting world of one of its incandescent lights, and the world of Sherlock Holmes of one of its finest—debatably its greatest—interpreters of that complex creature who dwelt at 221B Baker Street. Brett was a performer who

touched many people's lives, and even those who never met him felt a numbing loss at his passing. His own personal charisma, allied to the vibrant chemistry of Holmes, created a special magic which will remain potent for many years.

During the course of the Granada series I had the good fortune to meet and become friendly with Jeremy Brett and Michael Cox, the producer whose idea I he Holmes project was. In many conversations with them, and other individuals involved in the series, I was able to put together an intriguing picture, fragmented bill detailed, of how the series worked and how Jeremy Brett contributed to its success.

The title of this book is a phrase Jeremy Brett used in a discussion with me when analysing his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. He said that in trying to fathom the intricacies of the character, he had occasionally found himself 'bending the willow somewhat, but never breaking it'. I believe this act of 'bending the willow', giving a fresh and dangerous edge to his performance while attempting to remain true to Conan Doyle's conception of Sherlock Holmes, added greatly to the success of the series: it was undeniably instrumental in Jeremy Brett's eventually being regarded as the definitive Sherlock Holmes.

Here then, with the help of Brett's own words and observations, is an insight into the man and the series. I hope you find it as absorbing as I do.

DAVID STUART DAVIES

August 1996

I DIDN'T REALISE, and this was just recently from playing this part, that the world is longing for heroes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is one of the great heroes, and I always wanted to put him first because he invented these two marvellous men: Holmes and Watson. I don't want to talk about whether he is Doctor Watson or whether he's Sherlock Holmes. He is not: he is the author. He is both. So it's his brilliant invention and what Conan Doyle has done is to actually create another end-of-the-century hero yet

again. It's marvellous, I think, sometimes to see England in all its Victorian mists of mellow fruitfulness, and dense green fogs, and carriages, and tumbling clouds of light from opera houses, and cascades of glistening chandeliers, and ballrooms, and the smoky atmosphere of Baker Street and the density of 221B, and that is a part of England which is not completely gone. It's still there to a degree. And there are people smoking pipes, I'm sure, in a little dense den in Baker Street even at this moment. But it lifts the lid off the end of a century, of a bygone time which of course we look back on with far too much romance in ourselves, because in reality it was terrible. It was riddled with poverty, urchins in the street far worse than now but, nevertheless, there is a mirror image between the two centuries, and I think Doyle's done it again. I think he's given us another hero through to the 21st.

JEREMY BRETT

1988

One

Jeremy Brett: The Actor

WHAT IS ACTING? Let me tell you: it is a trivial pursuit—one in which grown men and women put on clothes that are not theirs, adopt voices that are not theirs, and pretend to be someone they are not, living and feeling a life that is not theirs. All this is done in the name of entertainment. And we—their audience—are the gullible conspirators in this pursuit. We accept the pretence, go along with it and allow ourselves to laugh or cry at the fraudulent presentation. There are wars going on out there in the real world; there is real crime, real pain, real blood, real tragedy, and real farce. What need have we for actors? Why do we indulge these liars—these dissemblers? Why has mankind in all civilisations, in all countries and throughout all history indulged these people?

Because actors ennoble us. They provide the mirror which is held up to nature to reveal the human beast in all its manifestations and all its dilemmas. They explore the human condition so that, with the aid of their diabolical collaborators, the writers, they reveal the meaning, the futility, and the beauty of life. We understand why we are what we are because of actors. We can do without politicians. We can do without soldiers. We can do without businessmen. We can do without so many of the supposedly important cogs in the machine of life. But we cannot do without actors. Because without them, we would not know ourselves.

Jeremy Huggins was an actor. He was an actor who shone because he was dangerously real. His performances were seldom comfortable—but then real life is seldom comfortable. Perhaps if he had not suffered from one weakness, he would today be regarded and revered in the same way that Olivier, Richardson, Gielgud, Burton, and Stephens are. For, like those knights of the stage, Jeremy Huggins's real home was the theatre. It was here where his flame burned its brightest, its warmest, its fiercest, its truest. Like them, he had the fine intellect necessary to analyse, dissect, and interpret a role truly and definitively. But there was that weakness: he was beautiful. A strange adjective to use in describing a man. I use it not to suggest effeminacy or a kind of male prettiness, but in the same way I would use it to describe a thoroughbred stallion, Michaelangelo's *David* or Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*'. There was with Jeremy Huggins a perfection and sublime symmetry in his features that was beautiful. And as every intelligent, beautiful woman will tell you, beauty can get in the way. Outsiders rarely see or reach beyond the beauty to value the other qualities. Such, I believe, was the case with Jeremy Huggins, the man who, in later life, became the personification of literature's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes.

As Sherlock Holmes, Jeremy Brett not only convinced as the character, he also touched—*really touched*—millions of people's lives. There was an unfathomable alchemy in the performance that was very special to so many. Of course, in the end we are only talking about a character from a story book and a talented performer who played him. Small beer in the great scheme of things. But the mesmeric actor who became Conan Doyle's fabulous character on screen provided a buffer against those slings and arrows of the grey, mundane world. He gave us magic time: quality

moments which enriched and delighted. That is *not* small beer. And that is why this book has been written.

Bending the Willow is not a biography. This is not an attempt to chart the life of Jeremy Huggins, whom fate decreed we should know as Jeremy Brett. This is not a record of Brett's theatrical successes and failures, nor is it an exposé of the man's personal life or sexual mores. It is simply an attempt to record and analyse the last stage of his life when he took on the role of Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective character, Sherlock Holmes, for a British television company. It was a role that fascinated, frightened, and consumed him. It was a role that will bring him a kind of immortality. It was a role which he played with a brilliance that we are unlikely to see again.

So, I repeat, this is not a biography—more salacious hands than mine may pen that—but I believe it is incumbent upon me to present you with some basic biographical details so that it is possible to place the Brett/Holmes phenomenon into some kind of context.

Jeremy Huggins was born in 1933. Like many in the acting profession, he tended to slip a couple of years away for safe keeping: 1935 is often the date given in reference texts. Warwickshire was his county; upper crust was his background. The youngest of four brothers, he joined the epicene throng at Eton. His father, a hot-tempered military man, had no time for actors and forbade the young Jeremy to use the family name for his theatrical debut. Let's face it, Huggins hardly lends itself to attractive marquee billing; and Huggins Senior was therefore doing his son a great service in issuing this dictum. Young Jeremy chose the name Brett from a label he found in a suit.

After studying at the Central School of Speech and Drama, whose tutors helped to iron out a speech defect, Jeremy Brett's acting career began in earnest where, in a strange, mystical way, it ended over forty years later: in Manchester. The early 'fifties found him learning his art at the Library Theatre in this great northern city—a city that was very soon destined to become the home of Granada Television. His dark, regular features and dashing demeanour soon led him into leading roles. It was while he was at the Library Theatre that he first acted with Rosalie Williams, who later made the role of Mrs Hudson, Sherlock Holmes's landlady, her very own.

But brighter lights than Manchester beckoned the young Brett. He went to Hollywood to appear in King Vidor's movie *War and Peace* (1956) with

Audrey Hepburn, with whom he was reunited in 1964 when he returned to Tinsel Town to appear as Freddie in *My Fair Lady*. In the intervening years he had made a solid reputation for himself on stage and television. He was a splendid Dorian Gray and, according to critic Kenneth Tynan, a 'too beautiful' Hamlet.

In 1958 he married actress Anna Massey. They had a son, David, before divorcing five years later. Both admitted in later life that they were too young at the time and far from ready to take on the demands of married life. In a recent interview, Anna Massey said, 'I think Jeremy was somebody who never grew up.'

By the mid-'sixties, Jeremy Brett was well established on the London stage. Although not yet a household name, he was revered by the profession, and was even screen-tested for the rôle of James Bond. He caught the attention of Laurence Olivier, whom Brett called 'his great God', and was invited to join the National Theatre, where he appeared in a string of successful productions. None was more adventurous than the all-male version of *As You Like It*, in which Brett played a strikingly handsome Orlando alongside a cast of embryonic theatrical knights: Anthony Hopkins, Derek Jacobi, and Robert Stephens.

In 1980 he starred in a Sherlock Holmes thriller on stage in America—playing Doctor Watson. The play, *The Crucifer of Blood* by Paul Giovanni, was a reworking of Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four*, and starred Charlton Heston as the Great Detective. At this period, Jeremy Brett had no idea that he would, in the fullness of time, be trading Watson's bowler hat and medical bag for Holmes's magnifying glass and hypodermic syringe.

The late 'seventies and early 'eighties was a rich period for Brett's television appearances: he starred in such notable dramas as *Rebecca*, *On Approval*, and *The Good Soldier*. In the States, *Rebecca* was shown on *Mystery!* and the latter two on *Masterpiece Theatre*. Both series were produced by Joan Wilson, whom Jeremy Brett married in 1976.

As the 'eighties beckoned, Jeremy Brett received a telephone call from a television producer with Granada by the name of Michael Cox. There was an amazing part on offer to him. The phone call led to a meeting for dinner one wet evening. As the conversation rolled and the wine was consumed, a figure in the shadows not far from the table observed the mechanics of television history moving in their mysterious but inevitable way. The figure,

not unlike Jeremy Brett in appearance, puffed contentedly on his pipe, while in one hand he held a deerstalker hat.

Two

Kick-starting the Series

MICHAEL COX WAS THE GREAT BEGETTER. Without him there would have been no Granada *Sherlock Holmes* series, no body of fine adaptations of the Conan Doyle stories, and no Jeremy Brett as Sherlock. Therefore we have much for which to thank Michael. His enthusiasm for the series and the character of Sherlock Holmes stemmed from his own interest, developed in childhood, which he maintains to this day. Michael's vision was to put the genuine Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes on the television screen, and it was Michael who had to battle with indifference and cynicism in the corridors of cathode-ray power at Granada to get the project off the ground. It was a case of 'Oh, no, not corny old Sherlock Holmes again'. That was the point, of course. It *wasn't* corny old Sherlock Holmes again: this time it was to be the genuine article, not ill-written and ill-conceived pastiche or parody, but a rich amalgam of the Conan Doyle genius and an animated Sidney Paget^{1*} world. The year was 1980 and the Conan Doyle stories had just come out of copyright—what better time to give the world a dramatised, authentic Holmes?

Michael was determined to cast Jeremy Brett as the deerstalkered crusader:

'By complete coincidence Jeremy and I both began our professional lives at the same theatre in the same city: he joined the company of the Library Theatre, Manchester in 1954 as a very glamorous juvenile lead; I followed two years later as an assistant stage manager, the lowest form of theatrical life. By that time Jeremy had become a film star, as Nikolai Rostov in King Vidor's version of *War and Peace*. A quarter of a century later we were both in Manchester again to launch him on his lasting success as Sherlock Holmes.

'In the years in between I worked my way up the television ladder, first as a director and then as a producer. I probably made the mistake of pigeon-holing Jeremy as a mere matinee idol. After all, I never had the good fortune to see him in *Hedda Gabler* with Maggie Smith or as the son in the original production of *A Voyage Around My Father* with Alec Guinness; and he was cursed with those devastating good looks. Of course, I saw him as Freddie in the film of *My Fair Lady* and then he spent most of the 'seventies in the States and Canada appearing in Shakespeare and

Congreve and touring as Dracula. On television he played Maxim de Winter in *Rebecca* for the BBC—much better, I thought, than Olivier played it for Hitchcock.

'Granada wanted to have someone to play Holmes who was a better known name—particularly in the States. Because Granada had produced *Brideshead Revisited* recently, the names suggested to me were Jeremy Irons and Anthony Andrews.² I was not convinced, especially about Andrews. I suppose because the project was my baby, they let me have my choice, which was Jeremy.'

Jeremy Brett remembered how it all came about:

'I'd just played Robert Browning opposite Jane Lapotaire. I was trying to set up a film of *The Tempest* which I'd done in Toronto and I was in England trying to raise the money. Not a penny could I get. So I reconsidered the role of Sherlock Holmes that I'd been offered the previous year. It had been put on hold then because Ian Richardson was filming a series'.

As it turned out the Richardson series ceased after two movie-length episodes: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Sign of Four*. These films, heavily padded with non-Doyle material, failed to excite programme buyers when they were shown at Cannes in 1982. Nevertheless, Brett had a high regard for Richardson's portrayal: 'He got a coolness which I thought was marvellous—like an electric eel.'

Mapleton Films, which produced the Richardson Holmes, had entered into a dispute with Granada. Michael Cox observed:

'The notion was that Mapleton Films had acquired the sole rights to the characters of Holmes and Watson for the United States so they could do what they liked. It was a position that Granada challenged. Eventually we won, but it held up our series by two years.'

Granada's success in this legal wrangle sealed a dismal fate for the Mapleton movies. They were shut away in the ITV vaults until 1986, by which time the Granada series had firmly established Brett and David Burke as television's Holmes and Watson.

When Granada finally received the green light to go ahead with their series, Brett took the Sherlock Holmes canon away with him to Barbados where, ostensibly, he was researching locations for *The Tempest*.

'It was there that I became fascinated with Doyle's tales. I thought—oh yes, there are things I can do with this fellow. I learned that it wasn't all pipes and deerstalkers: there were different pipes and he smoked cigarettes as well; and he wore a homburg and a topper in town and a deerstalker in the country. Best of all, there was a dark and mysterious character to explore.'

As Brett read the stories he began to realise there really was much more than the clichéd image given to Holmes by other film makers:

'For example, I discovered he was much more puckish than I realised. I remember I read: "He wriggled in his chair and roared with laughter." I had never thought of Holmes as laughing. Actually I had rather a bad attack of the giggles in "A Scandal in Bohemia"—that's one reason why I don't like that film.'

Once Brett was certain he could, as an actor, do something with the character—plumb its depths as it were—he agreed to take the part, and travelled north to Granada Studios in Manchester. In retrospect, Brett was the ideal choice to play Holmes, but when he came to the series—a young man in his forties—he brought with him the aura of the matinee idol: he had both the style and the magnetic attraction that so epitomised the romantic heroes of the golden age of Hollywood. However, he was also a brilliant actor who could play other than himself, a facility which eluded the Gary Grants and Ronald Colmans, charming though they were. Whether Michael Cox was fully aware of it at the time, even he cannot now be sure, but there were about Jeremy Brett two elements which aided his personification of Sherlock Holmes on screen. Firstly there was a dangerous, almost eccentric, edge to his playing which was attractive, and fascinating, but which also created a sense of pleasurable unease in the audience. We could not help but watch his every move, listen with bated breath to his every nuance. Secondly, Brett exuded a fierce sexual ambivalence, ideally suited to the character of Holmes, who moved in that paradoxical Victorian age when lust and primness jostled side by side in the public consciousness. Men were fascinated by Brett's Holmes, a fascination which stirred uncertain emotions within the modern man's breast. Women were less troubled: they admired and lusted after him.

The fact that the Sherlock Holmes stories are still in print after one hundred years and that the character has featured, and continues to feature, in plays, films, pastiches, and parodies reveals that there is more to this character than simply the ability to solve apparently unsolvable crimes. His grip on the public's imagination goes deeper than the thrill of the investigation, the unmasking of the villain. He touches emotions. Readers of both sexes weep at 'The Final Problem' when Watson says he will write no more of 'the best and the wisest man whom I have ever known', and they cheer and smile when the wily sleuth, decked out like a decrepit bookseller, returns to shock Watson and solve the mystery of 'The Empty House'. To touch deeply the emotions of a collective readership in that way, this man Holmes has to be more than a mere cardboard cut-out detective. He has an attractiveness to both men and women. Perhaps it was as Jeremy Brett noted: 'Women want to possess him, while men want to *be* him.' There is certainly some truth in that statement, but the idea is incomplete. I believe

male readers not only identify with Holmes, but also experience, in the same way that D. H. Lawrence identified what he referred to as a 'blood consciousness' between men, a kind of spiritual closeness akin to love. Brett had such magnetism that he could draw on this inherent characteristic in the literary figure of Holmes and project it in his performance, thus gaining allegiance and love from viewers of both sexes.

So it was that Jeremy Brett came to this challenging role. He followed an illustrious line of thespians who had taken on the Holmes mantle: acting greats such as John Barrymore, Raymond Massey, Basil Rathbone, John Gielgud, Peter Cushing, John Neville, Robert Stephens, John Wood, and Charlton Heston. But what Brett achieved that none of the others did was that he explored the *mystery* of Sherlock Holmes. In his playing he gave clues and hinted at solutions to this mystery, but he was never crass enough to present a clear expose. What is this mystery? Holmes's character, of course. Most actors had played Holmes by simply taking him from the printed page with all the well documented attributes, but few, if any, had attempted to delve deeper than this. Brett was intelligent and perceptive enough to realise and appreciate that Conan Doyle had, in creating Sherlock Holmes, given birth to a rounded character with motives and reasons for his eccentric and idiosyncratic persona. His dislike of women ('Women are never to be entirely trusted — not the best of them'³); his reliance on cocaine (a seven-percent solution); his hatred of the society of others; his fierce and diverse intellectual passions, which ranged from the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus to the ancient Cornish language and back again: all these were not gimmicky trappings foisted upon the man by Conan Doyle to make him seem odd and interesting, but were aspects of a character who became flesh and blood to the public even in the author's lifetime. One must remember that the primary source for Holmes's creation was an actual person: Professor Joseph Bell, Conan Doyle's own tutor at Edinburgh University where he studied medicine. In simple terms, Jeremy Brett saw Holmes as a 'real' character, not simply a cardboard cut-out with a ragbag of eccentricities created in order to make him more appealing. Holmes was more than this, and Brett appreciated what a hundred years of readers had seen, had perceived, more or less unknowingly: that Sherlock Holmes was that rare blend of the very human and the mythic. Simply slipping on the

deerstalker hat and clasping a meerschaum pipe while uttering the immortal and incorrect line 'Elementary, my dear Watson' would not do. Brett knew, as a consummate actor, that it would not do for him. A role has to offer depth and a challenge. Brett had the foresight to see that Holmes offered both. It was prosaically put — 'Oh, yes, there are things I can do with this fellow' — but it was the cornerstone for the success of the series. Doing something with the fellow, bending the willow, was what it was all about.

Whether Michael Cox or Jeremy Brett realised at this early stage the real potential of this venture is now impossible to gauge. I asked Michael in the autumn of 1995 why he had chosen Jeremy Brett as his leading man—what was right about Brett that was right for Holmes:

'What was right for Holmes was the classical actor's Hamlet factor, if you like. The fact that he could play that role; that he had the voice and the actor's intelligence to make the lines work. He had six or seven of the characteristics that you want to put together which are the voice, the looks, the intelligence, the presence, the physique, the ability to jump over the furniture, handle the horses, do the disguises, and whatever may be. To me he had the best combination of all those.'

But wasn't he devilishly handsome? Holmes was never devilishly handsome. Michael laughed at this observation:

'Jeremy was always going to be handsome. There was no way that one could avoid that. I remember Sandra, my wife, saying to me when the project was being set up, "Heaven's above, why do you want to do yet another version of those two dreary old folk in Baker Street?" And I said, "Suppose Sherlock Holmes was played by Jeremy Brett?" And she said, "Ah, well, that's different." '

Different it was indeed.

Sandra Cox's reaction to the casting further convinced Michael that the attractiveness of Brett would work to the character's benefit:

'We could all argue till the end of time about the sexual potential of Sherlock Holmes but for me it was all banked down, sublimated into his work and so on. But I think he was a sexy character in the broadest possible sense and if you have him played by a man—be it Jeremy Brett or Daniel Day Lewis or some actor who has got that kind of sexual charisma—then you've got it right.'

Somewhere in the vaults at Granada is Jeremy Brett's film test as Sherlock Holmes: 'It's ghastly,' he told me, laughing. The film is silent but shows Brett in costume and make-up. 'You see I perceived Holmes as being black and white, rather like the drawings, so I proceeded to cake my face with white make-up. And of course if you do that your eyes and the rims around them appear red. I looked as though I was ill, had flu or something. And I had a funny walk. It was like a waddle.' At the memory of this he broke into a roar of laughter. 'It really was awful.' However, the idea of

Holmes in black and white stayed with Brett right to the end of the series. 'Colour softens the whole thing. It adds pastels and warmth to his world and this softens and romanticises it. Whenever possible I kept Holmes in black and white to retain some of the sombre quality of the stories.' These conceptions and cogitations about Holmes reveal not only the commitment of the actor but also the meticulous and caring approach he took to bring Holmes to the television screen.

In the meantime, the casting of Watson also required serious consideration. Again Michael Cox was clear who he wanted: 'It was important that Watson was seen on screen as Conan Doyle presented him in the books: a brave, hugely likeable but sensible ex-army doctor.' It was time to expunge the silly ass image that Nigel Bruce had created in the Basil Rathbone Holmes films of the 'forties. It is true to say there had been sensible Watsons since then—Andre Morell in the 1959 version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a fine example—but they had been one-offs, and had not stayed long enough under the Doctor's bowler to make a lasting impression on the general public. It is also true to say that Bruce's personification of Watson actually raised the Doctor into full partnership status with Holmes. No one had done that on film before 1939. Pre-Bruce, all Watsons had been very much also-rans, rather like silly little poodles trotting behind their master, billed near the bottom of the cast list. So we have that for which to thank Bruce. What we have to blame him for is a whole series of carbon-copy Watsons: bumbling white-haired men who looked astonished if Holmes lit his pipe—the Thorley Walters⁴, the Bernard Foxes,⁵ and at times, I am afraid to say, even the Nigel Stocks⁶ of this world. This image is so potent that even today when the Baker Street pair is presented in advertisements, Watson is always presented as older, much fatter, and behaving like a bewildered donkey. Michael was going to have none of this: 'It seemed to me that if we were going to get Watson right—and I believe that he is the ordinary middle-class man in the street—then one needed an actor who could do that without being boring.' Michael's choice was instinctive: 'He was an actor I had worked with and knew. I admired his work very much and believed he had all the right qualities to make him an ideal Watson.' It turned out to be an excellent choice. David Burke became a splendid foil for Jeremy Brett's Holmes,

exhibiting natural good grace, humour, and a keen sense of justice. Gone were the inaudible mumblings of Bruce; in were the clear, sensible, and modulated tones of Burke. However, as Brett observed, David Burke, and later his successor Edward Hardwicke, were constantly on their guard to protect their characterisation from becoming either boring or stupid.

Michael Cox had also been masterminding the construction of Baker Street itself. In essence this well-known street is rather like another character in the stories, ranking alongside Lestrade, Moriarty, and Mrs Hudson. Even people in far flung corners of the globe who have never read a Sherlock Holmes story in their life know where he lives.

Originally Michael had suggested that Granada build 'a kind of Victorian London complex which would comprise of four streets, which could be turned into all sorts of locations like a dockside area such as Upper Swandam Lane featured in the story "The Man with the Twisted Lip". They liked the idea, but it was absurdly expensive. We had to compromise somewhat.'

The compromise was the building of Baker Street as seen in the opening credits of the Granada shows. Before this thoroughfare was constructed there had been a distinguished and celebrated precedent: the exterior set of *Coronation Street*, Britain's most popular soap opera. While discussions were being held about the possibility of creating a Baker Street exterior, David Plowright, the head of Granada, was all in favour of it. 'You mean', said Michael, 'the two most famous streets in England could run side by side in Manchester.' Plowright winked and that clinched it.

However, the rationale behind the building of the street was extremely practical: 'If the Sherlock Holmes series didn't last very long, the street—which was a facade hanging on a very stout steel girder structure—could be ripped off and replaced by some other exterior set.'

Jeremy Brett told me of his first view of the mock up of this fabled thoroughfare:

'I remember walking onto Baker Street and being terribly impressed. But I also got a shock. I was with my friend Bamber Gascoigne [British writer and television presenter] and he observed that Regent's Park was at the wrong end! But apart from that the street looked terribly authentic with all the horses and their droppings and straw. Michael was only happy when it was filled with carriages, people, and horses. But, to be honest, in the first few episodes the set appeared so unbelievably squeaky clean that it looked as though the street had just been built. It looked so false—no

dust, no grime, no sense of reality. It looked so "setty". However, once a good old Manchester winter had had a go at it, it began to look real.'

I suggested that the 'squeaky clean' description could have been applied to the interior set of Holmes and Watson's sitting room also. Brett gave a throaty laugh: 'Yes, yes. But we worked hard on making that lovely carpet look threadbare.' Similarly, the white fireplace surround gradually grew more and more smoke-discoloured as time went on.

The principal actors were cast and the set was built, so now it was time to consider the scripts and the basic approach to the series. Michael noted: 'We were allowed to commission scripts up to thirteen episodes culminating in "The Final Problem". Then if the series was not a success we could leave Holmes drowned in the Reichenbach Falls.'

In retrospect it seems crazy to think that this prestigious production could possibly be a failure, but these were nervous times and, as we shall see, an air of uncertainty hovered over this first series, creating tensions and apprehensions within the production team.

Writer John Hawkesworth was brought in to work with Michael Cox very early in the planning stages. Hawkesworth had a string of credentials which made him a suitable script consultant. He had worked on such notable period series as *Upstairs, Downstairs*, *The Duchess of Duke Street*, and a series of Conan Doyle non-Sherlockian stories. Steeped in the period, and aware of the feel of the stories, Hawkesworth appeared to be an ideal helpmate to aid in laying down the bedrock of the series. And in many ways he was. Initially, Cox and Hawkesworth proceeded to set certain ground rules as a guide to other writers. It was decided, for example, that Watson would not have a wife or a Mary Morstan romance and that any chronologies which attempted to place the stories in certain years or a particular period of Holmes's life would be ignored. To the serious Sherlockian scholar this may have seemed radical or even drastic; but one must remember that what Michael Cox and the team were dealing with was a popular drama series dedicated to bringing the essence of Sherlock Holmes to the television screen for millions of viewers, not a slavish, scholarly, and pedestrian re-telling of the tales.

Separately, Cox and Hawkesworth drew up lists of the tales they wanted in the series and then compared their choices: they were almost identical. Michael recalls that: 'John had "Silver Blaze" and I think I had

"The Bruce-Partington Plans", but we both had "The Speckled Band", "The Red-Headed League", "A Scandal in Bohemia", "The Blue Carbuncle" —in fact what you get in the first thirteen programmes.'

I wondered if they had considered showing that moment from the novel *A Study in Scarlet* where Holmes and Watson first meet:

Near the farther end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. 'I've found it! I've found it,' he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. 'I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by haemoglobin, and by nothing else.' Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

'Dr Watson, Mr Sherlock Holmes,' said Stamford introducing us. 'How are you?' he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should have hardly given him credit. 'You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.'

'How on earth did you know that?' I asked in astonishment. 'Never mind,' said he, chuckling to himself.

Cox admitted that:

'I would have loved to have filmed that scene, but it belongs firmly in that first story and therefore it would have been so difficult to do. Actually one of our original ideas was to film the first three novels. Then we thought that's not the best way to go, especially with that long flashback in *A Study in Scarlet*. So we decided to do what Conan Doyle did for *The Strand* and do the short stories.'

In many ways it is a pity that the scene was never filmed for, at the start of the series and with a little poetic licence, both Brett and Burke could have got away with playing their youthful selves. The moment is a pivotal one in the Holmes-Watson saga and Brett, especially, could easily have portrayed the young Holmes fired with enthusiasm, possessing a portmanteau of quirks and readily demonstrating his detective brilliance. However, it was not to be.

In fact, the Granada series started, as did the run in *The Strand*, with 'A Scandal in Bohemia'. Michael told me that it was John Hawkesworth's idea to lift a section from *The Sign of the Four*—the part about Holmes's drug taking and his seven-percent solution—in order to introduce the characters to the viewers of the 1980s. This was done, of course, without any conception that a few years later they would actually film *The Sign of Four*.

By the time the first series was about to go into production, both producer and star were steeped in Sherlockian knowledge. They had read and re-read the Holmes stories to glean all they could about the man and his habits, predilections, and mannerisms, as well as the period and the Baker Street milieu. However, Michael realised that it was essential that their knowledge and understanding of the canon should be passed on to all the creative artists working on the series:

'We are not all Sherlock Holmes freaks. I thought sympathetically of designers, make-up artists, costume designers, cameramen, property buyers, set dressers—and I thought to myself, I can't expect them to know that Holmes kept his tobacco in the toe of a Persian slipper or that he kept his unanswered correspondence nailed to the mantelpiece with a dagger. So I decided that we needed a reference manual that was not as bulky as the short stories and novels, and which could be referred to quickly and easily. The sort of thing you could look up that would tell you what Holmes would wear if he went out to buy a newspaper—whether it was spats or a top hat or whatever.'

With this in mind Michael, along with his associate producer Stuart Doughty and programme researcher Nicky Cooney, trawled through all the stories, lifting out any piece of information which could be useful for the series. The end result was *The Baker Street File: A guide to the appearance and habits of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson specially prepared for the Granada Television series THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*. It is a card-covered, stapled little gem containing nearly 1,200 listings. Here are a few typical entries:

HOLMES

Clothes and Dress

Wore a tweed suit - 'A Scandal in Bohemia'

Has a pea jacket - 'The Red-Headed League'

Has a long grey travelling cloak and close fitting cloth cap -
'Boscombe

Valley Mystery'

Had a large blue dressing gown - 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'

WATSON

Eating and Drinking

Had toast and coffee for breakfast - 'A Scandal in Bohemia'

Drank beer (in a pub) - 'The Blue Carbuncle'

Drinks whisky and soda - 'The Red-Headed League'

Pours tea for Holmes - *The Sign of Four*

Has been known to drink Beaune with lunch - *The Sign of Four*

There are thirty categories in this book which cover aspects invaluable to the properly department, the set design team, the costume makers, and of course the actors. It is, as far as I know, unique. Jeremy Brett referred to it as his second Bible - the first being the Conan Doyle canon itself.

With such meticulous preparation, at least one thing was certain. Successful or not, *'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes'* be an authentic venture, true to the spirit and intention of the man who created this singular detective: Arthur Conan Doyle.

Three The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes—The First Series

VIEWERS IN GREAT BRITAIN saw the first episode of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* on a mild spring evening in 1984. The story featured was the first to be published in *The Strand*: 'A Scandal in Bohemia'. However, it was not the first to be filmed. Michael Cox considered this story a very important one: not only does it present the viewing public with their first glimpse of the new Sherlock Holmes, but it also deals with his strange, ambivalent relationship with the American adventuress Irene Adler, whom Holmes regarded as 'The Woman'. Holmes's relationship with Irene Adler, such as it is, has suggestive undertones of repressed sexuality. She is the only woman in the whole canon to whom Holmes expresses a personal warmth that goes beyond mere pleasantries. Michael Cox wanted to make sure that both Brett and Burke were feeling reasonably comfortable with their rôles, especially Brett, before he

embarked on the filming of 'Scandal'. In fact it was the third show to be shot. The delay was worth it: the result was special.

Alexander Baron's dramatisation of 'Scandal' was masterly, in the sense that it was very close to the original text: perhaps too close for Jeremy's taste, for he liked a little clanger in the presentations. His penchant for bending the willow just that little bit further was always in evidence. Perhaps it was this scrupulous fidelity that caused him to observe in 1995 that the early shows were 'somewhat tame'. I believe he was wrong in this estimation. What he read for tameness was a writer following the narrative rhythm of Arthur Conan Doyle without serious deviation because the structure was just right for the story and for the television adaptation.

And, by Jove, Jeremy Brett was just right for Sherlock Holmes. In this first episode we see all the elements that make Holmes a fascinating character: his sometime reliance on drugs, his enigmatic charm, his mastery at disguise and deduction, and his fond but brittle relationship with Watson.

The opening sequence shows Watson returning to Baker Street and his friend Sherlock Holmes following a trip into the country. Watson is 'filled with apprehension' as to his companion's mood. Cunningly, we are immediately alerted to the uncertain nature of the relationship that exists between the two men. It has all the uncharted domestic connotations of a marriage. Watson suspects further drug abuse, especially when he observes an open drawer which reveals an empty hypodermic syringe. He is wrong. Holmes has tricked his friend into reaching this erroneous conclusion. In exasperation, Watson addresses his friend forcefully on the dangers of using drugs: '. . . it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change, and may at last leave a permanent weakness.' As previously noted, this sequence is drawn from the second Holmes novel, *The Sign of the Four*. It works well here, for it helps to establish both the relationship between the two men and the significance of their individual identities.

While Watson is cajoling his companion, all we see of Holmes is the back of his head. It is rather like the technique which the director James Whale used in the seminal horror film *Frankenstein* (1931). In this movie Whale first introduces the monster by presenting us with a back view of him. The moment is suspenseful—the audience is desperate to see his face. Then the grotesque creature slowly turns around to face the camera. With Holmes we are not dealing with a monster but an equally magnetic and

fascinating character, and the director of 'Scandal', Paul Annett, does the same in his opening scene. We, the viewers, are dying to glimpse the new Sherlock Holmes, but Annett delays the moment and then, slowly, he is revealed. My God, it is a live Paget drawing! For the next few minutes, the camera remains close on Brett's beautifully chiselled features as he talks to Watson and justifies his position as the only 'private consulting detective in the world'. This magnificent speech follows:

'My mind rebels against stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.'

Actors playing Holmes usually declaim these sentiments, bawling them histrionically at Watson. It was Peter Gushing in the BBC's 1968 production of *The Sign of Four* who first treated this speech as a quiet, impassioned plea. Brett takes the same tack (great actors think alike), but it has to be said that Brett's version is sharper, sadder, more tortured, and therefore more moving.

That first scene in 'A Scandal in Bohemia' establishes many things, not the least of which is that here we have a great Sherlock Holmes.

The rest of the film follows the original plot closely. The disguises are wonderfully convincing. The groom described by Conan Doyle as 'drunken-looking, ill-kempt and side-whiskered with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes' is so accurate and effective that one initially does not know it is Brett. The old clergyman, while having an element of theatricality, is also successful. Michael Cox observed that:

'Jeremy's great fascination in "Scandal" was the disguises without a doubt. Not so much the clergyman. He was disappointed in that one a little. He saw it as a rather obvious music hall turn—an old buffer in a flat hat, white wig and so forth. But the groom he was very proud of. I went to a rehearsal and was chatting with other people and asked where Jeremy was and there was this creature with pieces of piping up his nose and a red wig and strange teeth. I just did not recognise him. He was tickled pink. It gave him great pleasure. The groom remained one of his favourites. And he enjoyed taking the make-up off in front of the mirror while telling Watson what he'd done. That was another big plus for JB.'

Director Paul Annett told a fascinating tale regarding this scene which reveals much about the insecurity felt by Brett in the early days of the series: .

'Jeremy got very nervous about being himself on the screen. We were filming the scene in "Scandal" where he takes off the groom's makeup sitting in front of a mirror

at 22IB. We had two cameras shooting it because we didn't want him to have to put all that groom stuff on again— pipes up the nose and so on. So he was sitting there removing his make-up, using greasepaint and then suddenly he just dried. This was very unusual because Jeremy was a very professional actor. I said, "Jeremy, what's the matter?" And he said, "I looked in the mirror and I suddenly saw Jeremy." And I said, "But Jeremy is Sherlock—you are Sherlock—and that's who you see." Because he was taking off an extreme disguise he was so alarmed to see himself.'

The scene in Irene Adler's house where Holmes faints prior to Watson's diversionary tactic of hurling a smoke rocket through the window brought the following fascinating analysis from Brett:

'Holmes is ministered to by Irene Adler [Gayle Hunnicutt]. Now Holmes has never been so close to a female breast before. She's close to him, this beautiful woman with all the sweet essence of her sex. What is going on in his head at that moment? Confusion? Uncertainty? Is this onslaught of femininity the reason he refers to her as "The Woman"? I learned to question these things as Holmes.'

It seems to me that this minute dissection of Holmes's psyche reveals not only the care and seriousness with which Jeremy Brett approached the rôle, but also a canny and sharpened perception of the inner workings of the man. And indeed, as Brett played Holmes he was a man, not a figment of fiction.

Paul Annett recounted a story which throws light on Jeremy as an actor and how initially he was very wary of how he played Holmes. At the end of this film, the script had Holmes playing the violin in a somewhat melancholy way. Annett remembers that Jeremy was reluctant to do this:

He said that "what with the drugs thing at the beginning and the disguises—then if I play the violin at the end, the critics are going to say that I'm trying to do the Holmes things all at once and they'll maul me." But I persuaded him to play the violin, which actually he did quite well, and ended that episode very well indeed.'

It was Katharine Gowers, daughter of Patrick Gowers, composer of the music for the series, who played the violin on that occasion. She also features on the music heard over the opening credit sequence.

Once the series was shown on British television, there was little doubt in the minds of the *aficionados* of Holmes, or indeed the British press, that they were witnessing something special. Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* was impressed:

'A Scandal in Bohemia' might have been compassionately written by Conan Doyle for out of work actors, who would otherwise hang about on street corners making the place look untidy.

At any given moment in this story Sherlock Holmes, the King of Bohemia and Irene Adler are all pretending, with varying degrees of success, to be someone else. Not to mention a group of shabbily dressed men (smoking and laughing), a group of well dressed men (smoking and lounging), two guardsmen, a nurse maid and a scissors grinder, all extras engaged by Holmes and acting their socks off in the street.

Only dear Watson, congenitally incapable of pretence, preserves throughout the trusting demeanour of a faithful dog.

You can't clap eyes on the King of Bohemia (flame coloured silk cloak and a flaming beryl) without realising that here we have not only a bohemian but a flaming actor. Mrs Hudson must be not just a landlady but a *theatrical* landlady. She may even have trodden the boards once herself as a fire-eater's assistant professionally known as Flaming Beryl.

And when Jeremy Brett's Holmes tears off handfuls of assorted whiskers he reveals the sardonic sophistication of—good heavens —Noel Coward.

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes—a seven part series with another to come—is a very posh job indeed. So polished that, if you rub your hand over it, you would leave greasy finger-marks, so don't. I can recommend it as a luxurious, even luscious, way of passing the time. It is the best butter and I can't quite think why that is not what Sherlock Holmes needs.

'Except that the best butter did nothing for the works of the March Hare's watch, an instrument very similar in its precision to the mind of Sherlock Holmes.

Similarly, *The Sunday Times* felt sanguine about the series. Philip French wrote:

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes proves that Granada can do no wrong ; at the moment. In particular, Jeremy Brett and David Burke are the best Holmes and Watson I've ever seen. For once we can see why Holmes's only passion is detection. The first hint of an assignment galvanizes him into a fury of excitement. He takes an inordinate pleasure in dressing up as a labourer and an aged clergyman in order to spy on Irene Adler and he takes mischievous delight in the little deductive feats that astound Watson.

No wonder he needs cocaine when he's not on a case. But it's David Burke's Watson which shows why they are the great partnership of detection. In the famous Universal low budget Holmes films of the 1930s and 1940s [*sic*], Nigel Bruce's Watson was just a foolish old buffer acting as a comic foil for Basil Rathbone's razor sharp detective. David Burke acts with tremendous warmth, appearing in last Tuesday's episode, 'The Dancing Men', as a figure of reassurance for characters upset by Holmes's scientific disregard for all around him. Except for Watson, of course, whom he dragged with him on the investigation: 'I am lost without my Boswell,' he explained. In the stories this was necessary because Watson was telling the story. To make it convincing on screen is a real achievement.

The producer, Michael Cox, has spent his money shrewdly. The main interior is, of course, that most idyllic locale in all literature, 221B Baker Street, every detail of which, from the tobacco in the Persian slipper to the cigars in the coal scuttle is lovingly remembered by all Holmes addicts. Just as important is the excellent bustling Baker Street set which has been constructed by Granada.

Last week's episode was photographed by Ray Goode who was also cameraman on *Brideshead Revisited* and *Jewel in the Crown*. The designer Michael Grimes had filled the household of the ill-fated Cubitts with an enticing collection of Victorian objects and Goode's camera dwelt lovingly on them: the secateurs with which Elsie Cubitt trimmed her roses, the bottles full of mysterious potions and unguents with which she was treated after her suicide attempt, the astonishing white-tiled kitchen in which Holmes interrogated the servants. For once design was something more than archaic horse drawn carriages containing some vaguely Edwardian looking suits.

The first two of this Sherlock Holmes series are the finest and fullest literary adaptations since . . . well, since *Jewel in the Crown*.

'The Solitary Cyclist' was actually the first programme to be filmed—it was shown fourth. Michael Cox explained the troubled sequence of events that occurred before this show came before the cameras:

'When we set the series up I asked a director called John Davies to be the first director. He agreed but, just a few weeks before we started, he was offered the chance to direct a film version of *Kim* with Peter O'Toole, an actor he'd always wanted to work with. And the filming was to take place in India which appealed to John very much and so ... he escaped at the very last minute. I was left high and dry without a lead director.'

One must remember that these people were on the brink of a very expensive, major television project. To lose the director just before rehearsals were about to commence was a terrible blow. Jeremy Brett, David Burke, Michael Cox, and John Davies had already spent much time discussing and planning the episode—how I they would approach the telling of it and the characterisation of the leading players, etc. Michael Cox takes up the tale:

'After a brief panic, the director who came forward and saved the day was Paul Annett. I will always be grateful to Paul. He was not the obvious person to take hold of the reins, but he knew enough about Sherlock Holmes, enough about actors and film. He was prepared to do it and convinced me that he was the right person to handle it well, picking it up at such a late stage. And indeed he was. He did all the hard work on how Jeremy and David Burke were going to play the parts, what they looked like; what sort of clothes they'd wear; what sort of relationship there would be between them. And he saved Jeremy from a lot of pitfalls. Jeremy was in danger of playing the part as some kind of grotesque if he wasn't directed properly. I remember Paul saying to him one day, "Jeremy, isn't there going to be anything of you in this portrayal?" JB responded well and said, "What a good thought. You've pulled me up short and made me realise that I could be going too much into the area of a bizarre character." Paul said, "Don't, because there is a place in this for things of your own, Jeremy—your magnetism, your ability to charm people, to deal with people—use those in playing Holmes. Don't put them aside; don't think this man is a weirdo because he's not." '

Michael Cox added:

'You see, I honestly think that Jeremy didn't understand the part when he started. He'd no idea what kind of pull we would have with the viewing public. He didn't realise he would be playing a kind of intellectual superman who was also an approachable helper. And that came to him during the time he played the character when he began to realise that he was playing one of the saviours of the twentieth century.'

Paul Annett, who directed 'A Scandal in Bohemia', 'The Solitary Cyclist', and 'The Copper Beeches', has fond memories of the project. While talking to this very articulate and thoughtful director, it became clear that he is one of the unsung heroes of the series. He was in many ways instrumental

in channelling Jeremy Brett's talents and enthusiasm in the right direction in playing Holmes. His real involvement began when he went up to Manchester to meet Jeremy:

'I met him in the bar of the Midland Hotel and he was just charming. What was so weird was that Dora Bryan⁷ was staying there and she appeared at the entrance to the bar with her little dog—she was doing some game show up there—and saw Jeremy and greeted him like a long lost friend. Jeremy just didn't know how to divide his attention: to an old friend or his new director. It was quite funny. Then she moved off to speak to some other people. She'd popped the dog down and as Jeremy and I resumed our conversation we found ourselves watching this dog. We saw the elevator doors open and this dog had just walked in on its own and then the doors closed and it was whooshed up to whatever floor. We just collapsed in laughter. It was a real ice-breaker.

'I remember the first thing we did connected with Sherlock was going to a shop, to choose pipes. Then we went on to what was then a hard core, concrete base that was going to be Baker Street. It was before that very talented man Mike Grimes and his crew had set the street up. There is a picture of me and Jeremy in Peter Haining's book⁸; we were sitting there pointing at where Baker Street was going to be, while under our breath we were saying, "They're never going to have this up in time!" Neither of us really believed it would spring up as quickly as it did. But it did—and it was brilliant. In fact Michael asked me to shoot the opening titles which they used right to the end.'

But what of the character-shaping advice Paul gave to his star?

'Jeremy was a wonderful actor and a brilliant Sherlock Holmes but he was a little crazy, wonderfully eccentric at times. And, like a lot of actors, he was basically insecure, so when we started rehearsing he began plastering all this make-up on, moving around doing a funny walk and putting on a false nose. I felt rather like James Mason with Judy Garland in *A Star is Born* in the scene where she's having a screen test and he looked at her and said, "What's you and what's false?" He tapped her nose. I did the same with Jeremy. I said, "What on earth have you got on? Why have you got a false nose? And why are you doing a funny walk? You don't need to do that." I told him to peel it all away. And he turned to me aghast and said, "But all you'll see of me is Jeremy." And I said, "Well, that's what we want to see. You're quite eccentric enough as it is. You don't need that nose; you don't need to do a funny walk; you don't need a lot of make-up." I had more experience doing a series than he had and quite practically speaking if you carry a series, like David Suchet as Poirot for instance, you don't want to harness yourself with a whole lot of stuff you have to put on to become the character, otherwise you're stuck with it for years. The character should come through behavioural patterns and attitudes rather than false noses and funny walks. The actor has to evolve himself into the character. Jeremy was very nervous to begin with and then, bless him, he did come up to me afterwards and say, "Thank you, my dear, for not letting me do all that stuff."

'His wrists used to fly all over the place and we had this joke I used to say to him. "Don't flap the wrists about, Jeremy." He used to look at me at the end of takes and ask if the wrists were all right in that one.

'I think that if I made one major contribution to the show and to him and his performance it was that I used to keep him down all the time. He could go over the top so easily and I used to sit on him all the time and keep him down. I'd say, "You

don't need to do that. Don't do that. Just tell the story by being yourself." I thought he was most successful in those early shows when he claimed he didn't know what he was doing. He knew damned well what he was doing because he was a brilliant actor.'

Ironically, it was the sheer ebullience and extravagance of Brett's nature that in the end worked in favour of his interpretation of Holmes. Paul Annett concurs:

'Jeremy came over so superbly as Holmes because of the very theatricality that he had as a human being which was part of him. If you could harness that and keep it in check, then you had a superb performance—which he gave.'

Although Paul Annett came to the rescue, this last-minute upset did not help the general uncertainty and apprehension felt by the crew. It was a major project, and no one knew whether it would succeed or slip indelicately down the drain. At the same time, Paul Annett was aware of the responsibility resting on his shoulders and, perhaps because of that, certain things were overlooked. Jeremy remembered an amusing moment that illustrated this sense of unease:

'On the first day of location filming, they were shooting the scene where Carruthers is seen following Violet Smith on his bicycle along the woodland track. The cameras were ready to roll, when it struck me that John Castle [Carruthers] didn't have a false beard on which is essential to the plot. Now John has a very distinctive face—the girl would easily have recognised him—as would the audience. Very quickly they scrabbled round for a black beard and dark glasses and started again. That's how nervous we all were.'

Paul Annett told me that he felt depressed when he saw the first cut of 'The Solitary Cyclist', because it wasn't at all the way he wanted it:

'So I started at the beginning and went through every single frame again to mould it into the version I wanted—the one that was right for the series. Post-production in those days took a long time—but there seemed to be more time then. Jeremy was extremely keen to see all the rushes. He was probably the only actor I know, other than Charles Dance, I think, who came to every session of the rushes. He was there every time—very much into what was going on. He had a very keen sense of the technical side of things.'

Even at this early stage in the series Jeremy Brett was determined to be true to Conan Doyle. Paul Annett remembered that he and Jeremy were putting back into Alan Plater's script things from the story which had been omitted. Annett stated that:

'We all agreed that if we were going to do this series properly, we wanted it so that people who watched it could actually do a Ph.D. on Conan Doyle if necessary because it was so true to the originals. Now a lot of the adaptors—and they were very distinguished writers —obviously wanted to bring things of their own to the script and some of them, early on, would bring bits of another story and clever inventions and Jeremy would go crazy and say that we must keep this true to Conan Doyle.'

Michael Cox told me that the production team were to some extent worried about the whole melodramatic pitch of the story:

'We wondered whether we ought to tone it down, sophisticate it, make it less of a shocker than it is and in the end between Jeremy and John Castle (who played Carruthers and was marvellous) we decided to go with it. I mean at one stage I was saying that we could not call this guy Carruthers. It's a joke name for the stiff-upper lip character who appears in cartoons. But in the end we kept everything intact and did it for exactly the values that Conan Doyle wrote into it.'

One of my own favourite scenes in this episode is where Sherlock Holmes travels to the country, visits the local inn near Charlington Hall, and encounters the ruffian Woodley (Michael Siberry). The villain challenges Holmes to a fight after knocking the detective down. He calls Holmes a swine, but Holmes corrects him: 'A gentleman! Only a ruffian deals a blow with the back of his hand.' Holmes then proceeds to circle his opponent using some very fancy, fastidious footwork which prompts 'oohs' and 'aahs' of appreciation from the onlookers. Brett himself choreographed his little boxing dance, and it is most impressive. His stance, with his arms in the standard Victorian boxing position, is redolent of the period.

Michael Cox was worried about all the elements of this first show, and this scene was no exception:

'I thought, Gosh, are we going to get away with this? It's all rather balletic isn't it? But, in the end, I think we did. Or rather Jeremy did. Well done to him. And of course it echoes something within the story: the straight left against the slogging ruffian. He's doing the posh kind of boxing against the boorish brute.'

What started in this film, and carried on until David Burke departed, were little instances of unscripted banter between Holmes and Watson. These fleeting moments never went against what the writers had written. Indeed, sometimes it would be the off-the-wall interpretation of a line, such as repeated references to Watson's appetite, that would make an amusing, intimate moment. Michael Cox is firm in crediting the actors for developing this rapport.

By steeping himself in the canon, Jeremy Brett not only became an expert on Sherlock Holmes, he also became a champion of Conan Doyle. On this subject his passion would flame:

'Holmes is one of the greatest inventions that has ever happened in literature. The man lives; as indeed does John Watson—and this is amazing. I think what I now want very much is for Conan Doyle to be recognised as the Literary Giant that he is. He's been rather dismissed as just a thriller writer and, of course, he's not yet on the list of people to read when one goes to University in this country—although he

should be. In playing Holmes I rely on him to show me the way. I always go back to Doyle.'

It was because of his respect for the authorial source of the stories that Brett at times became angry with writers and directors who seemed to have little or no respect for the original stories. At the close of 'The Naval Treaty', shown third in the first series, Percy Phelps (David Gwillim) is presented with the missing document. The script called for him to dance around the Baker Street rooms with glee. Conan Doyle has it: 'He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, pressing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight.'

Extreme emotion certainly, but the recovery of this document has saved his life, his reputation and his sanity. Jeremy told me that the director, Alan Grint, thought that this was too much over the top and wanted to cut it:

'I managed to persuade him to keep it much as it was in the script, but it was hard work. I wanted the version to be as faithful as possible. Similarly, in the same story they wanted to cut most of the rose speech—"What a lovely thing a rose is!" I really had to fight for that.'

David Burke told me that:

'Jeremy gave quite a hard time to any writer or director who departed too much from the original. I remember one or two scraps over things that were changed unnecessarily and for the worse, though things do have to change for television to fit into the medium. It was very good for everybody because Jeremy achieved this with great charm and with great friendliness—not like a strict schoolmaster. He just wanted to get the thing right.'

When pressed, Burke remembered one such 'scrap' concerning the filming of Granada's 'The Crooked Man':

'There are some discrepancies in the film compared with the original story. Wood, the crooked man of the title, was originally engaged to Nancy and then years later they meet again when he is twisted and crippled, living a horrendous existence. Unknowingly, she has married the man who is directly responsible for his present condition. Now in Conan Doyle's words they walk towards each other down a darkened street and as they pass under a streetlamp, he looks up and cries out in recognition. It is a most poignant moment. These two people who had loved each other—she thought he was dead and now she sees him alive but he has become this terrible crooked creature. It is a touching scene, meeting under this Victorian gas lamp. If I were a film maker I would not need to change a thing to capture the poignant magic of that scene, but for reasons best known to the director and the writer, the scene was transposed into a crowded Salvation Army-style bazaar which to my mind destroyed all the poignancy of it and the isolation of these two figures. There was a big row over that. Jeremy and I were very angry about the change. Blood was almost spilt and tears were shed. I'm afraid we lost the battle. Jeremy was never selfish in that regard. He was always thinking about the wider scene and I thought it was grossly insensitive of the director and the writer to transpose that scene and to be unable to see that they had ruined it. It was like scribbling over a beautiful picture.'

The original script for 'The Crooked Man' was generally regarded as lacking fidelity and certain rewrites were made, but Michael Cox was at pains to point out that it is not always possible to transfer all that Conan Doyle included in a story on to the screen. It was not always a case of money or time, but the difficulty in presenting moments which do not translate literally to the screen:

'We all agreed it was an awkward story to do. We set it up with the idea of using Watson rather more than Holmes—the ex-military man bringing Holmes a case. But Jeremy decided that Sherlock Holmes would have hated the military discipline, the military ethic, and so he chose to play the early scenes very bad temperedly. I rather think he went a little too far with this approach. It's an interesting interpretation of Holmes's attitude to the army. If we could do it again, I would say to Jeremy, "Come on, don't be so cross in this one, especially the early scenes." '

Brett's decision about Holmes's dislike of military discipline is a reasonable one, but there is no evidence in the canon to support it. However, his own father was a strict military man, and Jeremy's decision may well have had more to do with his own predilections than Holmes's.

Michael asserted that there were some brilliant moments within 'The Crooked Man' episode:

'One of my favourites is where Fiona Shaw, now a famous actress, responds to Holmes's question about whether she told the police about the strange misshapen conjuror despite being asked not to say a word about him. "Of course not," she says adamantly, "a promise is a promise. A promise is ... a promise." '

The line, an original from the adaptor Alfred Shaughnessy, effectively underlines one of the themes of the story about fidelity and being true to one's word. It is yet another example of how this series, at times, was able to hone and sharpen the original story and expose nuances and ideas buried in the text.

Fidelity was always at the forefront of Jeremy Brett's mind. At the start of the project both he and Michael Cox agreed to use the Sidney Paget drawings, which illustrated the original stories in *The Strand Magazine*, as 'their image'. And this is what they attempted to do. In these early shows at least one shot was set up to mirror a Sidney Paget illustration, and Brett tried to look as much like the drawings as possible.

'The Naval Treaty' with the rose speech is a case in point. The passage and the Paget portrait present Holmes the dreamer, Holmes the philosopher, Holmes the vulnerable man. No wonder that Brett, the actor attempting to present a rounded character, wanted the scene in—a scene which, in its execution, beautifully mirrors the Paget illustration.

The speech itself is almost poetry:

'What a lovely thing a rose is! . . . There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion. ... It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers, our desires, our food, are really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers.'

It was Jeremy Paul, the writer, who told me that: 'Jeremy identified strongly with those moments when Conan Doyle allowed Holmes to speculate on the broader issues of life.'

Brett loved the rose speech. Somewhat prophetically, a few years prior to filming this episode he gave a speech about flowers that suggests a similar theme. In Hugh Whitmore's adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* for BBC Television, Jeremy, as the bored and disillusioned Maxim, takes the girl who will become his wife (Joanna David⁹) onto the cliffs overlooking the sea near Monte Carlo and makes the following observations:

'You should never pick wild flowers. Never. You should always leave them where they belong. The only flower which looks better when it's picked is the rose. I have roses in Manderley for eight months of every year. Roses are divine—great branches of light.'

There is certainly an echo here of the Conan Doyle speech and both touched a nerve, a philosophical leaning perhaps, in Jeremy Brett. Several of the crew who worked on the series have told me of his kindnesses to all on the set. He would send flowers to both men and women to celebrate any special occasion: 'After all,' he reasoned, 'everybody likes flowers.'

On the topic of 'The Naval Treaty' and disagreements, Michael Cox remembered that Jeremy also wanted to include Holmes's speech regarding the board schools, made during the train journey back to London.

'Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea'

'The Board schools.'

'Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules, with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future.'

Cox agrees that it's a marvellous moment in the story but—

'I didn't know how to present it as an image in the film. And I told Jeremy that I loved the speech, I loved the thought, I loved the feeling behind it but I didn't think we could actually show it. What can be done, as Jeremy Paul did in the play *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*, is do it in the theatre where you leave it to the audience to imagine what Holmes and Watson are seeing. But in a realistic film it wasn't possible.'

Jeremy was fascinated with what he had discovered as a subtext of 'The Naval Treaty': the class element. Percy Phelps comes from an upper class background and has connections with wealthy, aristocratic people who have promoted his career within the government service. He is about to marry into a family from a rather lower strata of society—iron founders from the north of England—and middle-class Watson was at school with him. The cross-fraternisation of the classes fascinated Brett, and the terrible class structure of England is clearly on display in this story. The fine, ironical exemplification of this, which pleased Brett, was the observation that the Foreign Minister had had his boots resoled. Here was a major political mover and shaker in the land—but he could not afford to buy himself a new pair of boots.

Of the first series, both Michael and Jeremy, independently, placed 'The Dancing Men' slightly higher than all the rest. Michael Cox told me:

'By the time we did that one, Jeremy and David had established a very good rapport and they contributed quite a lot of fun about the solving of the code. I know they contributed that bit of business at the end where Watson is explaining to the others how you break a code, saying E is the most frequently used letter in the alphabet. I suspect also that they contributed the moment where Watson is secretly reading Holmes's Monograph on ciphers [a 'trifling' monograph upon the subject of secret writings in which he analysed 160 separate ciphers]. Whatever, that was the kind of thing they enjoyed.'

Viewing it again, I agree with them that this is a very special episode. From the opening Baker Street scene which pictures the quiet domestic life of Holmes and Watson, the latter reading quietly while his friend examines some evidence with the aid of a microscope, through to the exciting conclusion when Abe Slaney is captured, it is a Sherlockian masterpiece in miniature. The script is by Anthony Skene, a writer who, surprisingly, was used only once; yet he seemed to be able to present in a tangible form the almost intangible nature of the Holmes and Watson relationship. However, as with many of these films, Brett made a significant input into the structure of the script. Again, attempting to be true to Conan Doyle, he wanted to include the whole of the deduction Holmes makes at the start of the story regarding Watson's decision not to invest in South African securities:

'I managed to do the whole of it. It was the first two pages of the story and I said, "I think I can do it straight from the book." And they said, "Don't be silly. You cannot lift literature off the page and put it straight onto film." And I said, "Can I try?" I didn't have lunch that day. I went to the backcloth and walked up and down, learning it. John Bruce, the director, said, "Jeremy wants another go." And I did it. It was very

nerve-wracking, very fast. And I think that was the turning point when suddenly I realised I was getting nearer Doyle's Holmes.'

Brett does indeed prove his point with this sequence, which is undiluted Conan Doyle, but which is fresh and exciting too.

His lithe appearance suggests that Brett rarely went to lunch in those days. He is like a black stick insect in this episode, with actions that are swift and energetic. Whether it is flinging off his dressing gown or leaping the sofa, we are in no doubt of this man's energy and alertness.

Brett was very fond of David Burke's performance in this feature:

'I loved the way David stood up for me when the local police didn't know who I was. He stepped forward and announced—"This is Sherlock Holmes."'

Indeed it was touches like that, subtle though they may have been, that revealed the strong undercurrent of friendship that existed between the two men. It is true that Conan Doyle rarely expressly demonstrated in the stories the bond between the fellow lodgers. Indeed, there are several instances where we observe Holmes treating Watson in a thoughtless, almost brutal fashion. The way he kept Watson ignorant of his escape at the Reichenbach Falls is an excellent case in point. Holmes allowed Watson to suffer the pain of loss and bereavement for three years before turning up unannounced—and in disguise—in Watson's consulting room. Not unnaturally, Watson fainted. Holmes commented, almost innocently, 'I had no idea that you would be so affected.' Actually, that scene is one of the keys to the Holmes-Watson relationship. It is a key that Jeremy Brett added to the others on his chain. Watson is allowed to faint, is allowed to shed a tear, to feel sadness. He is the reader, the man in the street. He is Watson, the caring doctor, the lover, the husband, the friend. Holmes, on the other hand, is the scientist, the reasoner, 'the calculating machine'. Emotion is alien to him. It would cloud his judgement. And if it starts to emerge he fights it. Jeremy Brett knew this and acted Holmes like this. But it did not mean that Holmes did not care for Watson. Brett told me more than once that he believed that Holmes needed Watson, perhaps more than Watson needed Holmes. I tried to express this in a speech I gave to Watson in my own play *Fixed Point*, a work that pleased Brett and for which he wrote a brief introduction. Watson's speech goes thus:

'Sherlock Holmes was unique. He was a genius. He was the world's first and best consulting detective. But he was something greater than all these. [HE PAUSES FOR EMPHASIS] He was my friend—the best and wisest friend a man could have. Oh, there have been those who have said that he treated me in a cavalier fashion by

letting me believe he had perished in the Reichenbach Falls. But it was what he had to do. He wasn't being false to me—only true to himself. He knew I would survive. I was an old campaigner, after all. But if you or anyone requires proof of the loyalty and—[MOMENTARILY LOST FOR THE RIGHT WORD]—love ... yes love, he felt towards me, I need only mention the case of the Three Garridebs when I was shot by Killer Evans. I shall never forget Holmes's words to me on that occasion: "You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say you are not hurt." It was worth a wound to know the depth of loyalty that lay behind that cold mask. [REFLECTIVELY—TO HIMSELF] It was worth many wounds.'

Jeremy Brett had a wonderful insight into this aspect of the Holmes and Watson relationship. He had, after all, played Watson himself in America in the 'seventies to Charlton Heston's Holmes in Paul Giovanni's play *The Crucifer of Blood*.

'In some ways Watson is stronger than Holmes. That comes through his kindness, I suppose. He sees Holmes's weaknesses and tries to protect him from them. Look how Watson rants at him about cocaine. Watson is always on the lookout in order to save his friend from pain, indignity or destruction.'

Burke's stance in 'The Dancing Men', embarrassed for his friend for turning up too late to save Hilton Cubitt's life and yet protective of Holmes when the local constabulary are ignorant of their visitor's identity—"This is Sherlock Holmes"—fits in exactly with Brett's assessment.

The first series contains many such telling moments, not only about the Holmes and Watson relationship but also about Holmes too. Brett was always on the lookout to indicate, for those with eyes to see, elements of the detective's character. For instance, he revealed this about 'The Solitary Cyclist':

'When I'm holding Violet Smith's hand and making deductions about her spatulate finger ends, I tried to portray the fact that SH found the touch sensuous.'

I watched the film again to observe this moment, which occurs at the opening when Violet Smith comes to Baker Street to consult Holmes on a problem which is troubling her. Initially Holmes does not want to take the case but the young woman is insistent. She also shows her independence and strength by declining the soft armchair which Watson offers her, sitting instead on a hard wooden chair. Holmes is taken by this. 'You must tell us your matter of great urgency,' he says, moving to her side. 'It is obviously not your health—so ardent a cyclist must be full of energy.'

'Yes, I bicycle a great deal,' she replies, somewhat surprised by the detective's knowledge. Holmes cocks a quizzical eye at Watson, allowing the doctor to explain his train of reasoning: 'Slight roughness on the side of the sole caused by the friction of the pedal.' 'Excellent, Watson!' cries

Holmes. It is as though this is an interchange between master and pupil. It also illustrates not only the closeness of the two men but the brightness of Watson. He is not after all, as Conan Doyle once remarked churlishly, 'Holmes's rather stupid friend'.¹⁰

Holmes then examines Violet Smith's hands, making a deduction that she is a typist, a fact which is indicated by her spatulate finger ends. We can see that Brett, as Holmes, does fleetingly find the touch of a woman's hand pleasurable and, realising this, he drops her hand very quickly. But then—and it is a big then—he touches her face, almost caressing her chin, while observing: 'There is a spirituality about the face, however, which the typewriter does not generate.' Again the moment is sensuous, the speech almost mellifluous; and then with a lightning change of mood and pace, Holmes is back to his sharp, cold, business-like self again.

Moments like this, fleeting though they are on screen—mainly observed in an almost subliminal sense—added depth to the characterisation of Holmes and his relations with others: proof positive against those who claim that Jeremy Brett was not a subtle actor.

'The Speckled Band' is generally regarded as the most popular Sherlock Holmes short story. It is a preposterous tale involving fantastic, risible, and incredible events, and concerns an irascible stepfather who has killed one of his stepdaughters and is in the process of trying to do away with the other in order to retain for himself the income from their inheritance. His means of murder is a snake—a swamp adder (a Conan Doyle invention)—which slithers down a bell-rope onto the unsuspecting girl's bed. It is recalled by means of a whistle and was trained by being given milk to ensure its return. What patience a man must have to train a snake using only a saucer of milk and a whistle—especially when snakes do not care for milk and their means of hearing remains questionable! And yet this dark, Gothic concoction works on the page; and it certainly worked in Jeremy Paul's adaptation for Granada. In later series, Paul was called upon to work wonders with slender material—creating, for example, a two-hour special out of the twelve-page story 'Charles Augustus Milverton'—but with 'The Speckled Band' he wrote possibly the most faithful adaptation of a Conan Doyle tale of the whole forty-one films. It works well because it is treated seriously by all. There is no sly humour here—the story is too dramatic. Right from the start Holmes

sees the danger, and this is conveyed to the viewer by Brett's flashing eyes and tense demeanour. It is all beautifully realised.

Brett remembered a challenge he faced during the filming:

'We had nearly completed filming at Adlington Hall and we had one scene to do. It was where I assure Helen Stoner that all will be well and tell her what to do that evening to avoid further danger. It was quite a long speech and the light was fading fast when we set up the shot. I realised that if I didn't get it right the first time we would probably have to come back the next day for this one scene. I gritted my teeth and did it the first time. On watching it back, I put down some of my nervous gestures to my anxiety about getting the shot in the can before the light went.'

The nervous tenseness fits in with the mood of the shot but, re-watching the scene with this knowledge, one can also observe a faint sheen of perspiration on Brett's face as he contends with complicated lines and failing light.

The climax of the story is slightly disappointing. When Holmes becomes aware of the deadly snake, he lashes out at it with a cane, an action which sends the slithery brute back through the ventilator to the room from whence it came, where it attacks its master, Grimesby Roylott (Jeremy Kemp). The problem is that Holmes's attack on the swamp adder takes place in the dark and we can only guess what is happening. A kind of stylised slow-motion version of the attack in a red hue, as though it has been caught by an infra-red camera, was played behind the credits, but this was rather too late. Michael Cox explained the dilemma the production team faced in filming this sequence:

'We were worried about the idea of hitting the snake. We pulled back from what could be seen as cruelty to a dumb animal. But you've got to remember that an actress who will allow a snake to crawl all over her gets my vote for courage above and beyond the call of duty.'

The final story in the first televised series was 'The Blue Carbuncle'. This is a wonderful story set at Christmas time and is, as Christopher Morley, the great American Sherlockian and founder of the Baker Street Irregulars, observed, 'a Christmas story without slush'—an observation that leads one to suppose he meant that the story lacks sentimentality. Well, no tale set around the Yuletide festivities which includes themes of forgiveness and redemption can be said to be totally lacking in sentiment. However, Granada tipped the jug of sweetness a little further than Conan Doyle did by building up the part of the wrongly charged man, so that we see his impoverished wife and children, his ignominious arrest, and touching release late on Christmas Eve. However, this sweetness is effectively

contrasted with Holmes: Brett brought sharpness and an unsentimental manner to the handling of the case. He even dismisses poor old Henry Baker with a flippant wave of his hand.

Michael Cox is especially fond of this film:

'If I had to choose a favourite scene, I'd probably choose the one where Holmes examines Henry Baker's hat and does the whole deductive bit about Baker's wife ceasing to love him and the fact he hasn't got gas laid on in his house and so on.'

What Brett contributed to the film was the business concerning the first cigarette of the day. Holmes, dragged from his slumbers by Peterson the commissionaire, rushes into the sitting room for a match, nightshirt flapping. An inveterate smoker, Jeremy knew the pangs of the early morning cravings, knew that Holmes, also a tobacco addict, would feel them too, and translated them into his performance: the great sleuth panting for his first gasp of nicotine of the day. Thank goodness he never attempted to show Holmes smoking his first pipe of the day, which was made up of the plugs and dottles on the mantelpiece: a revolting concept.

'The Blue Carbuncle' was shown in Britain, unseasonably, in June 1984 and, sadly, has never seen a Christmas repeat. The music of Patrick Gowers is particularly affecting in this episode; his variations on a selection of Christmas carols add tremendously to the feel-good element of the show. Seven good shows and true. Sherlockians and critics were well satisfied. But, while viewers had to wait thirteen months until the next series, there was no real break in the filming schedule: the first thirteen were shot one after the other. This was of course a punishing schedule for the regulars, especially David Burke and Jeremy Brett. However, it was not as arduous as it could have been, thanks to Brett. Initially the rehearsal schedule had been crippling: only one week before going before the cameras. After the first episode he asked for more time. He knew that, as the lead character with some incredibly complex dialogue to learn, he would begin to crack under that punishing time scale. With Michael Cox as his champion in this, he was granted an extra week. But to place this story in a wider context in order to illustrate that Brett was not always thinking of his own working conditions, Michael Cox related the following anecdote:

'Towards the end of his career as Holmes, when the restrictive trade unions had been broken and commercial consideration was paramount, he made a passionate plea to the new management at Granada. He asked them to consider the effect of repeated fourteen-hour days and six-day weeks on the private life of their employees. Jeremy was genuinely concerned about the impact these long hours had on the crew that he

worked with. So he wrote this well-thought-out and well-argued piece to the management about what they were doing to their people. He attended a management meeting and read the letter to them. They listened politely and said, "Well, thank you Mr Brett. My goodness, you do take an interest in the welfare of the team." And one of them—who is now a very big figure in television— said, "Actually my copy of your letter isn't signed, Jeremy. I wonder if you would put your autograph on it; I should so like to have that." And they did absolutely bugger all about his request! But they got his autograph.'

Four

Six to Reichenbach

FOR BRITISH VIEWERS, the first series of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* finished on 5 June 1984 with the showing of 'The Blue Carbuncle'; but the growing number of devotees of the programme had to wait over a year—until 25 August 1985—for the second series, which began with 'The Copper Beeches'. For the production team there was no such gap: Granada had nearly half the shows in the can before the first series was televised—before anyone knew for certain that they had a hit on their hands. Jeremy Brett once made the observation that in those early days it was not all that easy to attract big names as guest stars. 'They thought it was just another tired old Sherlock Holmes thing.' Michael Cox modified this view somewhat. While agreeing that there was a feeling in some quarters that reflected Jeremy's observation, he added :

'We didn't do too badly for names in those first programmes. We had Gayle Hunnicutt for a start. For me there really was no one else I wanted for Irene Adler. And we had Jeremy Kemp as Grimesby Roylott. However it was later in the series that the programme was able to attract such notables as Patricia Hodge, John Thaw, Jenny Seagrove, Eric Porter, Denis Quilley, Robert Hardy, Harry Andrews, Peter Barkworth, and others of that ilk'.

The opening show of the second series, 'The Copper Beeches', featured the fine actor Joss Ackland as Jephro Rucastle. He made a splendid job of this macabre rôle, which called upon him to be affable, humorous, and brutally menacing by turns. However, the really interesting casting in this show is that of Natasha Richardson as Violet Hunter. Natasha, daughter of the great Vanessa Redgrave and director Tony Richardson, went on to become an award-winning actress on stage and screen before her tragic death in 2009,

but 'The Copper Beeches' was her first featured role on television. The show's director, Paul Annett, tells the fascinating story behind this casting:

'I'd suggested Natasha Richardson for the rôle. She was amazing. She came to the interview with Karen, a wonderful casting director, and read for us and I was just blown away. She had Vanessa's voice, a wonderful manner and elegance. But she had this great big nose like her poor dad Tony Richardson—that's where it came from. When she left, I said that we'd got to have her—she was brilliant . . . perfect for the part. Karen agreed but she said, "What about the nose?" I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll just photograph it from the front; we'll do something. I'm not too concerned, especially when she's so right for the governess." Literally three weeks later when we started the first read through she came in and . . . she hadn't got that nose anymore. She'd been to Los Angeles, had a nose job and come back ready to act! And she was like all the really good people, she wasn't at all vain. She just knew she was starting a career and she was going to be on camera with close ups on her face and she didn't want this big nose to get in the way. But she was so open about it, saying things like, "Oh look, there's still a little bump there." Jeremy was a little bit jealous of the attention she received.'

Carlo, the 'ferocious' hound which attacks its owner, Rucastle, at the conclusion of the film was apparently the most placid of dogs. Michael Cox remembers that Joss Ackland had to act frantic fear while in fact he was playing with a dog who was enjoying a spirited romp. Ackland was especially good in the scene where he entertains the young governess with comic stories. I had always believed this episode in the original story to be unplayable if dramatised, and risible at best. But Ackland, with splendid control, was able to slip from the rather foreboding employer to the egregious family man to the avuncular and amusing raconteur. It was a chilling performance.

The opening moments of 'The Copper Beeches' are wonderfully atmospheric, from the mist rolling down Baker Street to the spirited disagreement between Holmes and Watson regarding the doctor's records of their cases. The actors both capture wonderfully the irritation each feels with the other. Holmes says: 'You have erred in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature of the whole thing,' Watson responds angrily with: 'It seems to me that I have done you full justice in the matter.' It is one of those rare moments in the stories where Watson stands up to Holmes and gives him almost as good as he gets, and it is performed with *brio*.

'The Greek Interpreter', which was aired second in the series, was especially interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it introduced Sherlock's

brother Mycroft, played with great aplomb by Charles Gray. Conan Doyle describes Sherlock's sibling thus:

Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light watery grey, seemed to always retain that far-away, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.

It would be a hard task to find an actor who fits that bill better than Gray. What he also possessed, which is not noted in Watson's list of characteristics, was a smile which could by turns be warm and inviting or steely and forbidding, the change-over aided and abetted by those 'watery grey' eyes. Indeed, Gray could almost have been born to play the part. He was a big man at the time and has since got bigger. With this bulk and his sardonic, inscrutable demeanour, he was able to portray the strange but potent combination of indolence, arrogance, and brilliance that makes Mycroft Holmes such a fascinating character. He had previous experience of the rôle, too, having played the part of Mycroft Holmes in 1976's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*.

For their opening scene together, Brett devised a shot which was rather clever. When Melas, the Greek interpreter of the title, comes to the Diogenes club, Mycroft moves to greet him; then Sherlock emerges from behind the bulk of his brother, giving the impression of the younger sibling escaping from his big brother's shadow.

The Diogenes Club, 'the queerest club in London', is superbly realised in the film. As Holmes and Watson pass through the club, one which contains 'the most unsociable and unclubbable men in town', Watson's amazement at these men sitting in silence, ignoring each other, is both amusing and touching. Burke's mobile features and expression capture the thoughts that we might have were we to enter this bizarre establishment.

The second interesting point about this dramatisation is that 'The Greek Interpreter' was the first film in which major changes were made to an original Conan Doyle story. In essence, the production was enhanced by a better finale. The original tale peters out with the villains meeting their just deserts offstage. The Granada version has an exciting train episode in which the Holmes brothers pursue the malefactors, causing the death of one and the arrest of the other two.

Michael Cox made this observation:

'It's a super story up to the last few paragraphs where I think Conan Doyle thought, "Oh I've wrapped that up and it's clear these people found their come-uppance at some future date" and so it ended somewhat abruptly. We wanted to give it a grandstand finale.'

George Costigan, who played the major villain Kemp, did so with pebble glasses, a chilling grin, and a rather high sing-song voice reminiscent of actor Peter Lorre, *the* Hollywood ne'er-do-well of the 'forties. The similarity was intentional. Costigan asked Michael Cox if he could play the character that way, and Cox thought it would be intriguing and gave the actor the green light. And so, as Michael put it, 'We ended up with a Sherlock Holmes film containing an echo of one of my all-time favourite films, *The Maltese Falcon*'

There are other touches of sly humour in the film. One such is when we see Holmes, Watson, and Mycroft in a railway carriage about to search out their quarry. Holmes is puffing maniacally at a cigarette, his head all but enveloped in smoke, while by his side there is a sign which states: 'Smoking is strictly prohibited in this compartment'. Similarly, as Holmes and Watson peer into various compartments looking for the Greek woman Sophy Kratides, Watson spies a nervous-looking female and alerts Holmes, believing her to be the one they are seeking. He gives the girl the briefest of glances and shakes his head, announcing: 'She is a machinist from Bradford who is going on holiday to find romance.'

As Kemp and Sophy Kratides are being led away by the police, Watson asks what will become of her. Holmes replies with a line not in the original story, but one that was a favourite with Brett and Cox: 'After questioning, nothing. It's not a crime to have a cold heart and not a shred of compassion.'

The closing shot is splendid, showing Brett at his flamboyant best—and yet his actions are quite illogical. It is the railway station at night. Holmes and Watson are now alone. Holmes, cane over shoulder, suddenly turns in a dramatic fashion as only Jeremy Brett could and walks off, away from Watson, down the platform until the hissing steam finally engulfs him. It is a very satisfying moment—but where is he going? He is walking in completely the wrong direction for the exit. Illogical, but rather magical too.

Regarding 'The Norwood Builder', Michael Cox and Jeremy Brett had a long, hard discussion about the part of the script where Holmes disguises

himself when he hides in the woods and meets a tramp. It really wasn't much of a disguise as such: there was no false nose, wig or other artificial aids. All we got was Jeremy in mufti, with unkempt hair and a dirty face. Michael Cox recalls:

'Jeremy said, "Holmes was taken unawares and would not have his makeup with him out at Norwood, Michael." So what he decided he would do is wash the gunge out of his hair and do a sort of country accent and play him as a totally different person but not someone who looks startlingly different. Frankly, I was a bit disappointed. I wanted him to do something more exotic. But I can see the logic of his position. So we went with Jeremy on that.'

It is a case of Brett being true to Holmes and the situation, but, I suspect, the viewing public would be on Michael's side on this issue. It would have been far more satisfying to see him buried beneath some glorious concoction, rather than the grubby, real Brett that we got.

'The Norwood Builder' also features one of those moments which help to establish Watson as a bright fellow who is learning some of the tricks of his friend's trade. When their client, the 'unhappy John Hector McFarlane', lands on their doorstep, Holmes claims never to have heard of him, adding 'beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.' Watson, with great panache, explains to the bewildered youth how his companion reached these conclusions.

Again, a part of this story was expanded and changed from the original. The Conan Doyle plot concerns a builder who fakes his own death and hides away in his house. He carries out his plan in order to revenge himself on a woman who spurned him in his youth, by having her son accused of his murder. To strengthen the story, the adaptor, Richard Harris, has the villain kill a tramp and burn his body so that the corpse would be thought to be his. Harris based this conception on an idea uttered by Holmes early in the story, suggesting the possibility that a tramp could be involved in the crime. The additions strengthened the script and gave greater weight to issues raised by the original text.

While it is true to say that Conan Doyle's Holmes stories are wonderful in their bizarre and mystifying way, and the problems Holmes faces are expertly set up, they can from time to time lose impetus and end with a whimper, rather than a bang. 'The Engineer's Thumb' is a case in point. Granada had wanted to film this story because of the wonderful gothic and

outré situations featured in it; not least of which the one where the unfortunate engineer is trapped in the room with the descending ceiling. Unfortunately, Holmes does not do very much in the case. He listens to Hatherley, the mutilated engineer, tell of his nightmare adventure and then travels to the scene of the crime, making a few minor deductions on the way, only to find that the baddies have bolted. End of story.

Script editor Craig Dickson told me that he had considered this story many times but decided there was just not enough Sherlockian meat on the bone. He told me:

'What I would have liked was to have Holmes trapped in the same room in which Hatherley had been imprisoned with the devilish machinery coming down on the detective, but I couldn't work this idea into a practical script.'

In 'The Resident Patient', Brett was particularly proud of the scene where he examines the patient's room, picking up all the clues without saying a word. He referred to it as 'the *Rififi*¹¹ scene' because it was similar to a sequence in a Jules Dassin film. It is a remarkable scene, especially for modern television, having no dialogue for two-and-a-half-minutes. And it does epitomise the essence of Sherlock Holmes's minute investigation of a scene of crime: all those passages that Conan Doyle created describing his detective crawling on the floor, inspecting paintwork with his lens, and scraping dust or cigarette ash into a small envelope for analysis are crystallised in this sequence, and Jeremy Brett knew it.

'The Red-Headed League' saw Brett re-united with an old acting companion— a friend from his Manchester Library Theatre days. Roger Hammond, who played Jabez Wilson, was assistant stage manager there when Brett had been starting out on his career playing juvenile leads. Jeremy enjoyed filming this story very much. 'It is so joyously comic: this mean pompous chap with ginger hair, the bizarre ritual of copying up the encyclopaedia and then the bank robbery, well, it has all the elements of a Ben Travers farce. Conan Doyle could be a very comic writer.'

Taking into consideration these comments, it is interesting to note that two of the actors appearing in this episode went on to achieve success in future comedy programmes on British television: Tim McInnerny, who played Darling in the *Blackadder* series, and Richard Wilson, who found comic fame as the grumpy pensioner Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave*.

However, the real point of interest about this episode is the inspired inclusion of Professor Moriarty. It turns out that he is the mastermind behind the plan to steal the French gold from the City and Suburban Bank, a deed executed by the fourth smartest man in London, John Clay (McInnerny). It had always been Michael Cox's plan to use Moriarty in this story, partly because Michael thought, as do many Sherlockians, that the Napoleon of Crime is too fascinating a character to be relegated to an appearance in one story only. Also, Cox and John Hawkesworth (who wrote this and the following episode, 'The Final Problem', in which Holmes and Moriarty confront each other at the Reichenbach Falls), thought that it would be more effective to introduce Holmes's nemesis in an earlier episode, so that the dramatic events of 'The Final Problem' could be seen in a more detailed context. The modern viewer is perhaps more questioning than a reader of *The Strand*, who in 1893 accepted without question the presence of this evil mastermind who not only controlled a great criminal organisation but was out to kill Sherlock Holmes. If he was so important and dangerous, why had we not heard of him before? In reality, Conan Doyle was in a headlong rush to kill off his detective, and these concerns did not bother him a jot; but to a modern audience, which has had the time to get used to the idea that Holmes dies, revives, and returns, it all seems somewhat implausible. Granada attempted to rectify this by at least showing Moriarty at work before the Reichenbach business.

'The Final Problem' was aired in Britain on 29 September 1985, a year after it had been filmed, and it was a special programme in many ways. Firstly, it was David Burke's last excursion as Doctor Watson. He had decided to leave the programme at this juncture because the strain of spending so much of his time in Manchester filming while his wife and young son were in Kent was beginning to become a problem:

'I had a very young son at the time. He was about two or three and my wife and I live in a rather remote cottage and it was tough on her because I was away a lot and I simply did not want to extend that. In one sense it was a sad break because I loved the programme, I got on very well with Jeremy, and Granada looked after us very well.'

Secondly, instead of filming within a fifty mile radius of Manchester as they had done with all the other episodes thus far, the cast and crew flew out to Switzerland to shoot the fatal encounter between Holmes and Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls. Not all of the scenes were

filmed at Reichenbach. The meeting between Moriarty and Holmes, as they faced each other on a wooden bridge, was filmed at Giessbach, some twenty miles from the Falls. The fabulous waterfall was described in detail by Conan Doyle:

It is, indeed, a fearful place. The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like the smoke from a burning house. The shaft into which the river hurls itself is an immense chasm, lined by glistening, coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. The long sweep of green water roaring for ever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing for ever upwards, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamour.

It was a splendid choice: a suitably remarkable and dramatic location for one of the most notable encounters in all literature, that between the greatest champion of law and order of his generation and the ultimate criminal mastermind. Michael Cox was determined to use this location to the full and show on screen Holmes and Moriarty's fall into the watery depths. Preparations for this stunt were considerable. Local workers were employed to swell the team of Granada technicians to help build the apparatus which was used to suspend and lower the stuntmen down the falls. It took five days to erect this structure and then tests were carried out with sandbags to judge its efficiency and safety. The first attempt saw the sandbags come to grief at the foot of the falls. Adjustments were made and further tests carried out, and one can only imagine the size of the butterflies which were rampaging through the plucky stuntmen's stomachs as the time for the take neared.

It was a large and costly gamble, but it worked brilliantly. Stuntmen Marc Boyle (Holmes) and Alf Joint (Moriarty) were each suspended by lengths of thin steel cable fixed to harnesses under their costumes and run from a specially constructed platform, hidden from view, at the top of the falls. When the cry for action came they were dropped into the foaming spray, spiralling and twisting and thrashing their arms about as though they were really falling. They were lowered at a speed of a little over 30 miles per hour, and Alf Joint reported that: 'It took about 25 seconds to make the fall. We fell about 375 feet and we were stopped by the wires.'

Then there was the painful winching back to safety to be endured. Wet and aching, the two stuntmen were met by Jeremy Brett, who cracked open a bottle of champagne in celebration of their courage and a stunt well done.

Conan Doyle wrote of Moriarty: 'He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organiser of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city.' It was especially easy to accept and understand the evil cunning and tenacity of this mathematics professor with a penchant for crime when he was played with such brilliance by Eric Porter. With lank grey hair, a twisted grimace, a stooping bent, and that infamous reptilian movement of his head, he was Conan Doyle's and Sidney Paget's Moriarty brought to life. Michael Cox had set his heart on Porter playing Moriarty:

'If he had refused, I should have had some difficulty in finding a second choice. When he joined us, I asked him why he had agreed to play such a comparatively small part. "I'm collecting great English villains," he said. "I've notched up Soames Forsyte and Fagin—I couldn't resist this monster." Eric Porter played Moriarty's dialogue with a fastidious intensity as frightening as the roaring snarl with which he leaps at Holmes for the last battle. He was, at first, doubtful about the reptilian oscillation of the head, which is probably the physical characteristic of Moriarty we remember most readily. I missed it in a rehearsal before filming began and we discussed it over a copy of the text and located the problem. Conan Doyle says that "his face protrudes forward and is forever oscillating . . ." We agreed that the word "forever" was the stumbling-block and the actor chose to let the mannerism show itself, like a ghastly tic, only at moments of crisis. It took that kind of care and concentration to give us a memorable Moriarty.'

Porter himself made this observation at the time he played the rôle:

'I have always felt that some of the performances of the earlier Moriartys lacked any real depth. He was just played as an unregenerate villain without any attempt at the real motivations of ego or pride that drove him to the confrontation with Holmes to prove which of them was a better man.'

The confrontation between Brett as Holmes and Porter as Moriarty in the detective's Baker Street rooms is one of the finest scenes in the whole Granada series. Each actor, submerged in his rôle, is highly charged, introducing subtle touches to enhance his character's personality or emotions. For example Porter, aware that Moriarty was the heartless mathematician who would have no regard for Holmes's passion for music, neatly demonstrates this contempt by idly plucking Holmes's Stradivarius on his entrance to the Baker Street rooms. Similarly, as the trenchant battle of words draws to a close, Brett wraps his dressing gown very tightly round himself as though he has felt a sudden chill—the chill of evil that emanates from his visitor. It is a throwback to a line from 'The Speckled Band', when Holmes's client assures him that it is not cold which makes her shiver but fear. And as Brett knew, Holmes is frightened of Moriarty.

Moriarty was given a little more background and plot involvement in Granada's 'The Final Problem' than he has in the original tale. It was scriptwriter John Hawkesworth's idea to credit the Professor with the attempted theft of the 'Mona Lisa' from the Louvre. He had taken the line from the story about Holmes being 'engaged by the French government upon a matter of supreme importance' in the spring of 1891. This addition was highly effective, for it succeeded in establishing Moriarty's power and the range of his machinations; and, with Holmes foiling his 'Mona Lisa' plot, it gave the Professor the impetus to seek a permanent resolution to the rivalry.

One memory of the show that Brett recalled concerned his make-up as the Italian priest—his disguise as he leaves London:

'Putting on that brute of a nose took over two hours so I had to make sure when I ripped it off in the train to reveal myself to Watson I did it correctly, otherwise it would have meant another two hours putting the thing back on. Well, we were lucky there, but it took six takes to get the fight with Moriarty on the edge of the precipice overlooking the falls. We got wetter and wetter; and it was a terrible strain on my back because Eric weighed 13 stone when he was dry but 14 stone wet!'

The programme was well received by the press and Sherlockians alike. Byron Rogers wrote in *The Times*:

A wonderful moment in television came in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Sunday ITV). It was the fall of Holmes and Moriarty down the Reichenbach Falls, the best fall ever filmed, much better than Butch Cassidy and Sundance, whirling arms in the spray, capes flapping. God knows how they did it.

Nicholas Shakespeare in *The Sunday Times* made some interesting observations about the two protagonists:

...Before the dramatic drowning, the ducal, aquiline Jeremy Brett—a thinner version of Donald Sinden—had come face to face with Moriarty. It was a splendid moment, Eric Porter, with a face of whey, a fish's mouth and long hair curling back behind around his ears, stared long and hard, twisted his neck and hissed, 'You have less frontal development than I should have expected.'

In *The Guardian* Nancy Banks-Smith paid a fond farewell to the series and its stars:

David Burke has been most endearing throughout. . . . Jeremy Brett's Holmes has been a striking portrait of an actor: the undulating velvet voice, the finger laid like an exclamation against the lips and the broad brimmed hat turned up a little at one side

...

Banks-Smith added at the end of her review: 'Friends of Sherlock Holmes may be assured that Granada are even now working on his resurrection.'

'The Final Problem' was a splendid end to *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*: thirteen films of admirable quality.

Five

The Return

WHILE WE WATCHED DAVID BURKE as Watson drying his eyes over the loss of his friend in a watery grave, shooting was already underway on the third series, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. But things had changed at Granada, and they were destined to change even further. To the average observer all was fairly placid on the Granada pool as filming commenced, but even at the start there were minor tensions.

Michael Cox, pleased with the way the first series had gone, felt relaxed enough about the future of Sherlock Holmes to take one step back to become executive producer and hand over the producer's chair to June Wyndham Davies. This was at the time when a new Doctor Watson was being introduced; and, as is the way with television companies when they see they have a guaranteed success on their hands with established values, it was felt that budgets could be cut and expenses pared clown a little. 'These fellows are professionals,' the money men say. 'They can make ten thousand look like a million dollars.' It was thin-end-of-the-wedge time with the series. There were no serious constraints—these were to come later—but the writing was on the Baker Street wall.

Interestingly, it was David Burke who was directly responsible for Edward Hardwicke becoming Doctor Watson. The two men, who knew each other well, were acting in a Shakespeare play for the BBC and Burke confided in Hardwicke about his desire to leave the Holmes series because of family commitments:

I've known David Burke and Anna [his actress wife Anna Calder-Marshall] for some time. I'd acted with them both and we knew each other very well. During rehearsals he was battling with this decision whether to stay with the Sherlock Holmes series. He and Anna had been offered a chance to go Stratford together. The problem was that Tom, his son, was still very young, two or three maybe, and if Anna was at

Stratford and he was up in Manchester, there would be no one around for Tom. At this time there had been quite a break in the Holmes series. Jeremy had gone to New York to do a play¹² and there was perhaps no certainty that the Holmes series would continue. With this offer to go to Stratford with Anna and the little boy he thought, on balance, it was the best thing to do. Then David came to me one day and said that he had made the decision to leave and go to Stratford. He also said that he and Anna had talked about the Watson role and thought that I was ideally suited for it and that I should get on to my agent. In the meantime he would speak to Jeremy about it.'

The new casting gained Jeremy's blessing, and Granada soon followed with a contract.

Although Brett and Hardwicke had known each other in the past, they had never acted together. They were with the National Theatre in the early 'seventies but at that time the players were split into two companies, and Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke were in separate production groups. Hardwicke told me: 'I certainly knew of Jeremy then and rather admired his flamboyant behaviour.'

What was to emerge as time went by was that this 'flamboyant behaviour' was, on occasion, the result of the upswing motion of the crushing mental illness of manic depression, which was more or less held in check until the death of Joan Wilson, his second wife. His health in general began to crumble during the filming of *The Return*. The reasons are complicated and even now not entirely clear. Just before his death he admitted on national radio that for years he had suffered from manic depression, which would surface from time to time and cause him to behave in a wild and whirling way. With the death of Joan in the summer of 1985, the strain was pushing him slowly but surely towards that dark destructive helter skelter ride again.

Jeremy became worried about the health of Joan during the last months of filming on *The Adventures*. Michael Cox told me that while he and Jeremy were blowing up balloons for the end of shoot party for 'The Final Problem' in Switzerland, the actor was concerned about Joan. He really wanted to be in America where she was having treatment for cancer, but the punishing Granada schedule could not spare him: 'I felt so frustrated that I couldn't be with Joan, although actually she really didn't want me around while she was having chemotherapy. She said: "You're not up to this."'

He admitted that Joan, an American television executive who actually worked on the Holmes programme in the States, was right. The first time he went with her to a Boston clinic, Jeremy fainted:

'I walked into the treatment room and saw the equipment pointing up at her. I just fell apart. I was such a dead loss. Joan told me: "You mustn't come again. It doesn't do you any good." I did go again of course and I was better.'

In an interview with *TV Times* in December 1988, he admitted: 'Joan was my confidence and without her there was no reason to go on.'

The strain of playing Holmes, living out of a suitcase in a Manchester hotel for weeks, trying to remember pages of intricate dialogue, and knowing that he was carrying an important television show would have been pressure enough; but all of this, combined with Jeremy's own brittle mental condition and the death of his wife, was enough to push him over the brink:

'I became increasingly isolated. And finally I had a dreadful breakdown and I was locked up in a hospital for around ten weeks. Suppose it might have been possible to keep this from my family if the fucking *Sun* hadn't plastered the story all over the front page. It caused my family great pain, but in a curious way it was therapeutic because it meant I had to talk to people. It was particularly hard on my son, David. And I shall never forget that Annie [Anna Massey, his first wife] used to drive him to the hospital to visit me. She would wait outside for him because she didn't want to come in and upset me. That's love.'

Manic depression is a destructive illness. It can lie dormant like a cunning animal, awaiting a weak moment when it can strike. This affliction was softened in the press at the time, and was blamed entirely on the untimely death of Jeremy's wife and the dark shadow that Sherlock Holmes had cast over his life and psyche. This was nonsense. Jeremy had suffered bouts of this foul complaint since his youth but, because he was always a larger-than-life character, others did not always perceive his mood swings as particularly strange.

Edward Hardwicke made this extremely perceptive observation:

'Jeremy was always going to be, in the best sense of the word, an eccentric. I think it's a wonderful thing to be. I wish there were more about; I wish I were one. So a lot of Jeremy's behaviour would have been seen as eccentric rather than manic.'

Whether Brett accepted fully that he was a manic depressive in those days is difficult to assess. Certainly Sherlockian Jean Up ton had a startling experience when talking to him on the telephone about Sherlock Holmes. When she suggested that perhaps Holmes was a manic depressive, he slammed the phone down without comment. This episode indicates Jeremy's sensitivity to his own weakness—a weakness which, in the closing weeks of his life, he fully acknowledged when he broadcast an appeal for the Manic Depressive Fellowship on British Radio. This is part of what he said:

'I have been diagnosed as manic depressive, so I know what I'm talking about. I need to remind you that I am a successful actor before admitting to having a severe mental illness—manic depression, which causes excessive mood changes with swings from extreme depression to great elation and hyperactivity. These swings are quite different from the range of moods from Monday morning lows to being on top of the world that most people understand and experience. In mania people will have tremendous activity and energy levels. They won't be able to sleep because of their rapid flow of ideas. They will spend money irrationally. They will have hallucinations and lose touch with reality. I personally have done some extremely embarrassing and destructive things when I've been high.

'When clinically depressed, one has panic attacks, no energy and suicidal thoughts. When I was admitted to the Maudesley Hospital in 1986, I was so confused I couldn't relate to anything or anybody around me. All I could do was lie face down with my fists clenched in my face. I believe I have been coping with these severe mood swings for many more years than I like to think, but being a member of a profession where being a little mad helps, my moods were tolerated far more readily than if I worked in a bank or a school. It is my success that has given me courage to admit publicly that I have this illness as an encouragement for others that it has not stopped me from being employed and leading a fulfilled and successful life. It is an illness that can be treated.'

This courageous statement was Jeremy's last professional engagement. It was broadcast on 3 September 1995. By the end of the month he was dead.

As Jeremy intimated in his broadcast, a sensitive disease of the mind which flexes its own destructive muscles leads the victim on a trail up to the peaks and down to the depths. Edward Hardwicke gave me a fine example of how Jeremy's normal high spirits and flamboyant eccentricities could, because of the pressures of the illness, get slightly out of hand. It was an occasion before filming had begun on *The Return*. This is how Hardwicke recounted the story to me:

'Before we started filming anything and I had got the job, Jeremy rang me and said, "Darling heart, we must have a meal." And we met up in a restaurant in Soho. He was terribly sweet. He was aware that I had a little bit of an inferiority thing about being an actor's son,¹³ which I know today is irrelevant. But Jeremy was sensitive to this. I can remember him leaning over the table to me and saying, "It's your turn now." This was very touching. He drank a little bit and then we walked out to get a cab and suddenly he said, "Come on—we're going to a jazz club." Well by this time I thought he was behaving rather strangely. Anyway we went to this jazz club somewhere in the Tottenham Court Road area. He wasn't a member at all but he conned his way in as only Jeremy could and we sat there in the dark—this smoky atmosphere—and I could see that he clearly didn't want to be there. He was clearly manic. And I didn't pick that up then but when I look back I can see that he must have been very, very worried about his work. Apart from his terrible crisis with the death of his wife—whom I never knew—there was the strain of the Holmes series. He had set it up, as it were, and it was tremendously successful and now taking on board a new Watson—rethinking the whole thing with another actor who was clearly

going to be different. No matter how you try to be the same, you are going to be different. So obviously that was a great pressure on him.'

Sadly, the deterioration of Jeremy Brett's health plays a significant part in the remaining saga of Granada's Sherlock and the struggle that Brett underwent in attempting to be Holmes and to remain sane. As the third series, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, began filming in the summer of 1986, there were no obvious signs of Jeremy's illness. But to those who knew him well there were subtle differences in his demeanour.

It was in August, when summer was bloated, the trees were rich with leaves, and the sun was giving hints of its waning powers, that shooting of *The Return* commenced. In the same way that the important first story, 'A Scandal in Bohemia', had not been filmed first, in order for the two leading players to become comfortable with their roles and their relationships, so it was with the filming of 'The Empty House'. This story, which tells of Sherlock Holmes's return to London, to Baker Street, to detective work and, more interestingly, to Watson, was actually filmed fourth to allow Hardwicke to get used to the role of Watson, and for Brett and him to settle down as new partners.

The first episode to be shot with Brett's new Watson was 'The Abbey Grange'. It is interesting to view the episode again with this knowledge, for there are certain points that a close viewing reveals. To start with, Edward Hardwicke has very little to do or say in the film. I do not know whether this was a deliberate ploy to help ease him into the series, but it seems to me a plausible explanation. However, Hardwicke does seem slightly uneasy, even frosty at times, and certainly more stoical than he later became. His is a much more sober Watson than Burke's. On the other hand, Brett seems fully at ease with his new partner, and is brilliant in the story, showing the intellectual superiority of Holmes, his humanity in allowing Captain Croker to go free, and the detective's athleticism when he clambers on to the great stone fireplace to examine the bell rope. (Sadly, in this scene the twentieth century intrudes, for one can clearly see an electricity cable tacked down with plastic staples running along the bottom of the cornice—a rare Granada blunder.)

What is also clear from this episode is the burden placed upon Brett in fronting the series. He has a great number of lines and intricate, analytical speeches, carrying the bulk of the script and therefore the flow and punch of

the story. In essence all other characters in this particular episode are adjuncts to his central wizardry. Any normal man with a fine constitution would wilt or crack under such pressures. Nevertheless, none of this stress shows on screen; or if it does, it is in the sharp edge that Brett gives to his characterisation, which is still the epitome of Conan Doyle's creation.

Brett's ease with, and growing closeness to, Edward Hardwicke was reflected in some of the warm touches he brought to their scenes in this series. He gave the impression of caring for his new Watson, and delighted in bonding with 'his fellow lodger'. One example is found in 'The Abbey Grange', where Holmes appoints Watson as a representative of a British jury — 'Watson, you are a British jury, and I never met a man who was more eminently fitted to represent one. I am the judge. Now gentleman of the jury, you have heard the evidence. Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?' The original line is as quoted: 'Gentleman of the jury'. But Brett broke the first word up to give a touching and kinder emphasis: 'Gentle man'. As he noted: 'Both Watson and Ted are gentle men as well as being gentlemen.'

As he had with David Burke, Brett, with the help of the writers, developed some lovely comic moments with Hardwicke in this series. Let me touch on two as pleasing examples. In 'The Six Napoleons' we see Lestrade (Colin Jeavons) sitting in the Baker Street rooms awaiting the return of Holmes and Watson. After idly glancing around the room, his attention is drawn to a file on the nearby table. Curiosity gets the better of him and he slyly lifts the corner up to examine it. At this moment Holmes and Watson arrive unnoticed and observe Lestrade's furtive activity through the half-open door. They grin conspiratorially at each other, retreat out of shot, and then in unison commence a loud animated conversation as though they are approaching the room for the first time. This causes Lestrade to panic a little, and he pushes the file back into place and attempts to resume a nonchalant demeanour. When Holmes and Watson finally enter they are grinning at each other, enjoying their harmless little ruse. It is a fine moment which underlines the closeness of the men.

A second example occurs in 'The Priory School', when Holmes and Watson are out on the moor following the cycle tracks which they hope will lead them to where the kidnapped boy, Lord Saltire, is being kept. They rest below a nest of rocks and while Holmes remains silent, peering at the

landscape, sensing and hearing nothing but his interior consciousness juggling with various possibilities, Watson is consulting a map and trying to work out where they can head for lunch. Watson notes the location of an inn. Holmes apparently takes no notice of his companion's utterances, and so with a sigh of gentle exasperation Watson rises: 'Well, that's where I'm going to try my luck. I'm hungry.' Breaking from his trance, Holmes looks up at his friend. 'Lunch!' he cries. 'My dear fellow, you must be starving. Observe that map, you'll see that there is an hostelry three miles in this direction.' Watson nods wearily and follows his companion, who is already streaking ahead of him. The scene is instructive, paradoxically revealing the separateness and closeness of the two men. The performances are splendid because they are understated and tinged with humour—and yet significant points are made.

Eventually they reach the inn and Watson orders food, while Holmes smokes a cigarette. When the food arrives, looking like a congealed pile of rancid vegetables, Holmes asks the disappointed Watson, 'How is it?' Watson replies evenly, 'It is disgusting, Holmes.' It is such moments of comic intimacy that gave a further dimension to these shows. Sadly, as the series continued there were to be fewer and fewer scenes like this, and our belief in the strong bond and relationship between doctor and detective was severely shaken.

Edward Hardwicke remembers that it was in 'The Priory School' that Brett behaved in such a way that caused one technician to observe, 'Jeremy is not himself today.' At all times in his job Jeremy was a professional, who would rise to the challenge of a take, but off set he could be 'down' or somewhat snappy. This was not the real Jeremy Brett: this was the mental affliction of manic depression taking over and controlling him. We all have our good and bad days: the cheerful-spring-in-our-step days and the got-out-of-the-wrong-side-of-the-bed days. With manic depression, these differing reactions are magnified.

In all my meetings with him—backstage, on location, and at his home—Jeremy showed nothing but friendship and kindness to me; but I have witnessed the sudden snarl, the icy remark, and the cruel rejection he has shown to others—classic behaviour of a manic depressive, but sad to watch in a man whose natural demeanour was one of jollity, caring, and love.

'The Priory School' is, in fact, Edward Hardwicke's favourite show:

'For my money, in the time I was connected with the series, that is the best film we made. John Madden was a very good director. Directing with film it has to be organic—the text and the movement and the visuals have to be one component. I always think that Tom Stoppard conceives his plays as a complete unit. It is not a text which is separate from the acting. And Madden of all the directors that we had—and we had some marvellous ones—was a true film director.'

Apart from the excellent performances, there are some stunning shots in this episode: the outstretched hand of the murdered German Master mutilated by the pecking birds; the silhouette of a deerstalkered Holmes; and the sweep of the Derbyshire moorland traversed by Holmes and Watson. Director Madden made effective use of the moors, creating a sense of moody, empty bleakness which was sadly never captured in Granada's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This is a double sadness because Madden was keen to direct the Dartmoor chiller, but was working on another project when the filming for *The Hound* was scheduled.

The ending of 'The Priory School' was heightened in Trevor Bowen's adaptation, which had Holmes leading a body of rescuers in search of the Duke of Holderness's bastard son, James Wilder, who had kidnapped the legitimate heir, Lord Sal tire. The search leads to a large cavern—'The Cathedral' as it is called in the script—which was used to hide stolen cattle in the old days. Wilder is cornered here and rather conveniently falls to his death.

The second show to be filmed was 'The Musgrave Ritual'. In the original story the investigation is presented as one from Holmes's youth, and is merely told to Watson as a delaying tactic so that the detective does not have to tidy up their shared sitting room. Sensibly, Jeremy Paul constructed the script to include Watson. Jeremy Brett's growing erratic nature began to seek out ways of making points about Holmes. The Paul script presented Holmes as a bored and very reluctant guest at Hurlstone, the Musgrave estate. Brett seized on this point and decided to suggest that Holmes was back on cocaine again. As a result we see Holmes behaving oddly for the first section of the film, wearing a travelling rug about his shoulders and giggling irrationally. In truth, I think we can now see that this unsettling behaviour had more to do with Jeremy's own demons than any of Sherlock Holmes's.

However, the production is a very effective one overall, and won for Jeremy Paul an Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of

America in New York for the screenplay. There is a weakness in the original tale concerning the height of an oak tree. A clever and essential point of deduction revolves around the tree remaining the same height for some centuries, which, of course, is neither possible nor logical. Paul cleverly got around this problem by making an oak tree a decorative feature of the weather vane. Perched atop of the building, it would remain the same height for as long as the building stood.

'The Second Stain' followed. It is a film which contains one of my favourite moments: in the closing seconds, Holmes, elated at having solved the case, literally jumps for joy. As he leaps with a typical Brettian 'Wha-hey!', the moment is frozen for the credits. Brett told me they had to freeze it there because he landed awkwardly.

Again, it was an idea that came from the star. 'It just fell right' he told me, unaware then, I think, that he was probing yet deeper into the character of Sherlock Holmes to reveal the more emotional layer beneath.

Both Brett and Hardwicke remembered the cold weather during the shooting of 'The Second Stain' and how unwell the actor Harry Andrews was. He played Lord Bellinger, the Prime Minister, and it was one of his last roles.

So, after three productions—'The Abbey Grange', 'The Musgrave Ritual', and 'The Second Stain'—they at last came to the one which would be broadcast first: 'The Empty House'. And they were into winter: snow can be seen falling in some of the early scenes.

Economies were now being made. The shots of the titanic struggle between Holmes and Moriarty were re-shown, but the long shots of the new Watson and the scenes of Holmes's escape were filmed in Wales rather than in Switzerland. However, there is an almost seamless blending of the shots. As Watson bellows Holmes's name repeatedly over the falls, we see Holmes clinging to the hillside some distance away, watching his friend. At one moment it almost seems as though he is about to respond with a cry of 'Watson', but then he stops himself. Brett explained:

'That was deliberate. It wasn't in the script but I just wanted to show that Holmes had affections for Watson and for a fleeting second they almost get the better of his practical mind. But they don't. [Large Brett grin.] It is a moment.'

This sequence also reveals that in the original filming, Granada shot Moriarty's death and Holmes's escape to place in the can in readiness for the

new series.

There was another disguise for Brett, this time as the old bookseller. It really is over the top, but the thinking behind this was simple. The series was called *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, and therefore viewers knew that Sherlock Holmes would turn up at any minute. No disguise, however subtle or restrained, would fool them, so Brett decided to let the pendulum swing the other way and make it outrageous. Whatever, it still fooled Watson. And when Holmes, in the time-honoured fashion, whipped off his whiskers, the good doctor fainted. Conan Doyle has it like this:

I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life.

Granada timed the faint to occur over a commercial break, which rather took some of the edge of humour and poignancy from the scene, though North American viewers had the advantage of seeing the event as an uninterrupted whole. It was one of Brett's favourite moments with Edward Hardwicke: 'I was very touched by his performance. Ted's faint and obvious relief at his friend's return was quite moving.' Indeed, on recovering, Hardwicke brilliantly captures the unquestioning affection and delighted joy of Watson at seeing Holmes 'here in my consulting room'.

The penultimate show, 'The Man With the Twisted Lip', was a fine one for disguises. There is Holmes in one of his most impenetrable ones, with a ski nose that would almost rival Cyrano de Bergerac, discovered by Watson in The Bar of Gold opium den. For a handsome man, Brett had a wonderful facility for totally changing his face to represent ugly and coarse individuals. It was a facility shared by Clive Francis, who appears in this episode as businessman Neville St Clair to his family and friends; but to his clients in the city, he is an ill-washed and deformed beggar, Hugh Boone, the twisted-lip man of the title. (Patricia Garwood, actress wife of writer Jeremy Paul, appeared as Kate Whitney in this adaptation by Alan Plater.)

The famous Paget illustration showing Holmes sitting on a pile of cushions, smoking while in deep contemplation, is beautifully realised by director Patrick Lau in this episode, which is one of the most satisfying of them all.

The last film in the first series of *The Return* was 'The Six Napoleons'—another good episode, with both humour and great flashes of

bravura acting from Brett. There is a smile-provoking bit of business while Holmes, Watson, and Lestrade are waiting in the darkness for the criminal to arrive on the scene. The policeman and the doctor are bored and fed up. Watson retrieves a bag of humbugs from his pocket and offers them round. Holmes, face taut and irritated, announces in terse tones, 'This is not the time for humbugs.'

Another moment worth noting is the way Brett whisks the cloth from the table, leaving the crockery and cutlery in place. The deftness and skill are in a sense typical of Holmes, but the business is Brett's, not Conan Doyle's, perhaps illustrating the process of osmosis that was occurring at this time. In many ways Jeremy Brett was blending his own character with that of the detective, and becoming a sort of Sherlock Brett or Jeremy Holmes. In doing this, he must at times have been sublimating his own natural effusiveness and gregariousness. The manic depression was taking hold, and colleagues were noting swings in his moods. Again, his own sensitivity is mirrored in his reaction to Lestrade's tribute to him at the end of 'The Six Napoleons':

'Well . . . I've seen you handle a good many cases, Mr Holmes, but I don't know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We're not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir, we are damned proud of you, and if you come down tomorrow there's not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn't be glad to shake you by the hand.'

As Lestrade (Colin Jeavons) is uttering these lines, the camera is close up on Jeremy Brett's face. The swiftly changing emotions are clearly mirrored in his expressive features and especially his eyes, which mist briefly before the 'cold calculating machine' of a heart reasserts itself. Despite Lestrade's praise, we somehow feel sorry for Holmes here. It is a splendid moment of acting.

Shortly after finishing the first series of *The Return*, Jeremy was admitted to Maudesley Hospital in South London, well known for its treatment of mental disorders. Edward Hardwicke remembers that period all too well:

'I went to see him in the Maudesley which is a grim, depressing place, although the treatment is absolutely superb. He was in there under the name of Huggins because everyone was keen that his illness should not get out to the press. The poor man . . . they had brought him really down with drugs to get rid of the manic element of the illness. That was the thing with Jeremy. If you rang him up and he sang down the phone, "I feel wonderful!", then you had to be worried. But in the Maudesley when I saw him he was very subdued. I remember I took some silly bits of food to him,

realising afterwards that it was a stupid thing to do. Food was the last thing he was interested in then.'

Jeremy Brett was in Maudesley for about ten weeks. Edward Hardwicke again:

'Granada realised it was pretty awful for him there, despite the fact that they had levelled him out, so very generously they got Jeremy out and into somewhere more comfortable and private. I remember him saying a terrifying thing to me at this time. Terrifying for an actor. He told me one day that he was really frightened and I asked him why. He said, "Because by balancing me and subduing me, I may have lost it—lost the ability to act." I understood that fear and it was very real for Jeremy. Obviously if you change you become much more tentative and the wonderful bravura quality of his performances would be lost. I do think that he was a great performer. He said to me on numerous occasions, "I wish I could do that again" or "I wouldn't do it like that again—I was over the top." I think at times perhaps he was over the top, but that's what you had to do to get the best bits right.'

When Jeremy Brett finally came out of hospital, Edward Hardwicke picked him up and took him home where they had a meal with Edward's lovely wife, Prin. In those recuperative weeks, Hardwicke kept a watchful eye on his friend, inviting him home, meeting him for a meal, and ringing him regularly. He behaved, you might say, as Watson would have done towards Holmes.

As a result of this illness there was a delay in filming their first two-hour special—and for many, their best—*The Sign of Four*. For this Granada pushed the boat out, as it were, and filmed it in 35mm. Again, Michael Cox was executive producer, while June Wyndham Davies took on the onus of producer.

While Jeremy had been undergoing the traumas of his mental struggle, the viewing public had remained ignorant. One or two stories had appeared in the press about his hospitalisation, one even suggesting that he had AIDS, but there had really been no big stir, so when *The Sign of Four* appeared on British television screens in December 1987 there was no erratic behaviour-watching, just general pleasure at having a double dose of Sherlock. All seemed as normal. There may have been turbulent currents in Jeremy Brett's life, but the public surface showed nothing but still waters.

It is true to say that both producers, Cox and Wyndham Davies, had their own favourites in writers, directors and actors. It would seem that with *The Sign of Four* some kind of compromise was made between them. John Hawkesworth., a veteran on the series and a Cox hand-picked man, wrote the screenplay, while Peter Hammond, a Wyndham Davies darling,

directed. The end result was terrific. Hawkesworth was particularly pleased to be working on *The Sign of Four*: 'Doyle is a splendid writer and I've always liked *The Sign of Four* personally—maybe because it just has enormous quality.'

The main problem with adapting this story for the screen is that, in a sense, there are two stories to present and, although the events of one touch on the other, the resulting whole is somewhat unbalanced. What is acceptable to the reader can appear disjointed and unwieldy in a dramatic form. In this adaptation, Jonathan Small's story—one of theft, deceit and betrayal—following as it does an exciting river chase, becomes something of an anti-climax. Holmes has got his man, none of his deductions have to be explained and, while there are still questions to be answered, our curiosity has been all but satisfied. John Hawkesworth could have turned the story around, presenting events in chronological order, but I do not think this would have improved things, and certainly elements of the mystery would have been lost. As it turned out, he decided not to play around with the dramatic flow of the original, and that in the end was a decided bonus.

This story is also pivotal in Dr Watson's life. In Conan Doyle's original, Holmes's client, the charming Mary Morstan, becomes engaged to the good doctor. But the whole Granada series had been built around the concept of Holmes and Watson as two bachelors sharing rooms. Indeed, as Michael Cox said at the time:

'We're not doing the marriage. Miss Morstan walks out of Watson's life at the end. However I do feel sorry for Dr Watson particularly. There's a lovely actress playing Mary—Jenny Seagrove—and one could well see why Watson would fall in love with her. On the other hand I think that the great strength of all the stories is that the relationship between Holmes and Watson is simply one of the greatest friendships in literature. And it doesn't quite work if there's a wife around the corner. My theory is that Doyle rather regretted marrying Watson off.'

Certainly this is a theory that both Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke also adhered to:

JB: 'She would have got in the way. Watson was more in love with Holmes—in a pure sense—than he could have been with a woman. He wouldn't want to give up the excitement, the danger.'

EH: 'Doyle wrote the book as a one off, never thinking that he would draw on the characters again.'

The other point to bear in mind is that the story that Conan Doyle wrote presents the relationship between doctor and sleuth in a different manner to the one which Brett and Burke/Hardwicke had already built up with the

viewing public. Brett in his wry manner commented that 'if Watson had gone off and left Holmes for a woman, Holmes wouldn't know what to do. He'd be stoned out of his mind every night!'

In this adaptation we also lose the material found in the first chapter of the novel, which deals with Holmes's cocaine addiction and his thoughtless deductions about Watson's watch. This was mainly due to the fact that the drug references had been used in Granada's first film, 'A Scandal in Bohemia', and while the watch sequence is instructive, it does hold up the plot.

The Sign of Four was very well received by Sherlockians and the press alike. Such was Michael Cox's affection for the world of Sherlock Holmes that he arranged for a party of Sherlockians from the Sherlock Holmes Society of London to visit Granada Studios for a reception and a special viewing of the movie. I was one of those lucky souls who travelled to Manchester on a drizzly December day in 1987. They were actually in the throes of filming 'Wisteria Lodge' that day, but we were able to pay a brief visit to the interior set of Baker Street and later actually to walk down the famous thoroughfare itself. Jeremy posed for photographs and was charming, but seemed uneasy in the presence of so many eager admirers.

By this time he had suffered a second bout of severe manic depression. It was at this period that his hair was cut quite short. He explained the reason for this change to me thus:

'Before my hair was long, and it had to be combed back and plastered down to keep it in place. Now that it's short, I can play with my hair, run my fingers through it, ruffle it, which I just couldn't do before. It's just something else to help me play the character.'

Sadly, the real reason for the change had more to do with Jeremy's mental instability than another ploy to humanise Holmes. He was, by the time of the second series, beginning to hate Sherlock Holmes, even stating so in the press. He told Geoffrey Wansell of *The Mail on Sunday*: 'I never liked the devil from the start. I can't find anything of me in him,' adding, 'I must learn to live again.' In trying to 'live again' and perhaps shake off the dark shadow of Holmes, he cut his hair in some kind of symbolic act.

Edward Hardwicke told me the truth behind the haircut:

'Jeremy just got into one of his manic states—you know, I hate Sherlock Holmes etc., and one day he cut his hair. In front of the mirror, he lopped bits off. I remember the first time I saw him after he had done it. We were both appearing in an 80th Birthday Tribute to Sir Laurence Olivier at The National. He turned up at the theatre and I

said, "God, what have you done to your hair?" It was patently obvious it had not been cut by a barber—there were bits sticking up all over.'

The make-up department at Granada had to deal with the mangled thatch, as did producer Michael Cox, who, keeping up appearances, suggested that the shortlocks Sherlock worked. I was dismayed, as were many other champions of the series. At that time, of course, we were not aware of the seriousness of Brett's illness.

The second series of *The Return*, which began airing in Britain in the spring of 1988, consisted of four hour-long episodes. The two-hour special of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was filmed at the same time but shown later.

It is strange how so many times the second series, and in particular Homies's demeanour, reflected the real life of Jeremy Brett. The first episode was 'The Devil's Foot', a tale in which the detective is suffering from exhaustion and depression and is forced to take a holiday in Cornwall. Of course a crime presents itself and Holmes is able to shake off his malaise and solve it, but not before he has a chance to behave rather oddly. There is an air of self-indulgence about Brett's performance. At this time Jeremy was feeling rather 'up', entertaining members of the cast by singing to them at the dinner table in the evening. Edward Hardwicke confessed, 'I always used to exit before this cabaret began. It always rather embarrassed me but the rest of the cast enjoyed it immensely.' Indeed, Denis Quilley, who played Dr Sterndale, made reference to these occasions during Jeremy's memorial service.

Jeremy's exuberance while filming 'The Devil's Foot'—an exuberance that to some extent was a result of his illness—led him to make additions to the story, some not always in keeping with either Conan Doyle's Holmes or his previous performances. It was that great enthusiasm and thrill at developing the character that was responsible for us seeing Holmes wearing a bandana around his head, as Brett had worn one in the swinging 'sixties. He also draped his scarf around his trilby hat in a strange way. Bohemian, maybe; risible, certainly. A still in *The Sunday Times* which featured Holmes with this scarf/hat concoction was captioned: 'Sherlock Holmes as a teapot!'

Similarly, it was Brett who decided to cry out Watson's first name, 'John', when he emerged from his near-fatal experiment with the drug. I

quite liked that personal touch, but I had mixed feelings about the strange content of the drug-induced dream Holmes experienced before being shaken awake. Brett worked on this with director Ken Hannam and put his own ideas in. Some of these consisted of contorted images of Holmes's struggle with Moriarty at Reichenbach; Holmes rubbing his eyes and dark red blood oozing from his clenched hands; Holmes wandering amongst the strange monoliths on the Cornish peninsula. All these uneasy images seem to reflect in some way Jeremy Brett's search for some philosophy in life. Various religions appealed to him. He was to have similar ideas in the later film of *The Eligible Bachelor*, where he added a picture of Christ to the Baker Street room set.

One addition to 'The Devil's Foot' that I did find appealing was Holmes's (apparent) final rejection of cocaine. We see him on a lonely beach where he buries the infamous syringe with which he took his seven-per-cent solution of the drug. Said Brett:

'It was my idea. Mainly for the young people. I wanted to show them that Holmes didn't rely on drugs. I contacted Dame Jean [Conan Doyle] and asked her permission and she said yes. She liked the idea because she believed that too much had been made of Holmes's drug habit.'

The scene is also an apt counterpoint to one later in the film, referred to above, when, in scientific pursuit of the truth, Holmes once more exposes himself to the danger of drugs and nearly pays the ultimate penalty. As Holmes regains consciousness, he confesses to Watson, 'It was an unjustifiable experiment for myself, doubly so for a friend. I really am extremely sorry.'

The second film in the series, 'Silver Blaze', was more straightforward. The script was in the capable hands of John Hawkesworth. Too capable, perhaps, in the sense that it was all a little plodding.

'Wisteria Lodge', which was, according to Jeremy Paul, the very devil to adapt, was a strange tale as Conan Doyle had it, but stranger in this version. Paul explained that he expunged the black magic references because in the original they are misleading and seemed to be dropped into the tale for 'colour'. What was left looked good, but was hard to follow. The show did boast a bravura performance from Freddie Jones (when does he *not* give a bravura performance?) as Inspector Baynes. Brett and Jones had a light-hearted sparring match while performing together, each one trying to out-twinkle the other, and some of this comes across on the screen.

Jeremy made this interesting comment about their association:

'I couldn't quite get hold of Freddie and play with him. I remember there was a scene where he was eating sugar babies and every time he had a sugar baby, his tongue would go a different colour. So I said, "Can I know before we do a take what colour you're going to suck so I'm ready for it—bright orange, bright green or black? I just want to know." He said, "No." "May I have a sugar baby?" I said. "No," he said. [Brett laugh.] We couldn't quite see eye to eye.'

The final case in *The Return* is 'The Bruce-Partington Plans', and it is a fine version of this story. Again Charles Gray played Mycroft Holmes, and both he and Brett were noticeably stouter than they had been in 'The Greek Interpreter'. In Gray's ease it seemed a natural stoutness, but with Brett it was the conflicting medications that were causing him to swell: it was a kind of water retention. He put a brave face on this problem, but it was painful to him. He was well aware that he had been just under twelve stone (168 pounds) at the start of the series, and by this time he was moving towards sixteen stone (224 pounds).

In the revised edition of Peter Haining's book on the series, *The Television Sherlock Holmes*, Brett apologised for '. . . not being as lean as I should have been in the last twenty films. This has been due sadly to what has only recently been diagnosed as heart failure. I am now living on foxgloves and water pills and I'm told that in the not-too-distant future I will be lean once more'. This is dated 9 November 1993.

The note makes sad reading, partly because it highlights the growing unease with which he carried on playing the character of Holmes—a character noted for his leanness and finely chiselled features. As Morse or Poirot or Cracker, the extra weight and girth would not have mattered much—in the case of Cracker it would have been a positive bonus. But with Sherlock Holmes, leanness was an essential requisite.

Six

The Disappointing Hound (or The Dog that did nothing in the Ratings)

WHEN *THE ADVENTURES of Sherlock Holmes* was first televised in 1984, I wrote to Michael Cox asking him if Granada would be including *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in future filming schedules. He replied saying that there were no plans to film this story and for various reasons he thought that it was unlikely they ever would. Whatever the 'various reasons' were I know not, but they were obviously cast aside as the Holmes series grew in popularity and, perhaps more importantly, became more commercially successful. One can imagine some executive somewhere seeing the financial potential of shooting a feature-length production of Conan Doyle's most famous and grisly tale with the actor whom the press had tagged as the ideal Holmes.

It is now not absolutely clear why Granada decided to go ahead with the story which Conan Doyle himself called 'a real Creeper', but they did. Sadly, the final product turned out to be what most fans of the series regard as the weakest entry. How could they go wrong with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*? How indeed! However, go wrong they did.

In my final interview with Jeremy Brett in the spring of 1995, I asked him, if someone could wave a magic wand and he could have a final crack at one of the unfilmed stories, which would it be? Without a second's hesitation he replied: 'I'd like to do *The Hound* again. I think we can do much better than that.' He refused to expand on that statement, but on an earlier occasion he had been more outspoken:

'I was terribly unwell making that film. It was underconceived. If you are making *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which is the most famous story of the lot, you've got to think it very carefully through and you've got to get the Hound completely sorted out before you start. If you can't get the Hound right—then it's better you don't see him. We didn't get it right. It was a stuffed mastiff—thrown at me. The script drifted—which is fatal. Holmes was away too long. So many things weren't quite right. I'd love to do it again ... in another lifetime.'

If only!

But Jeremy was accurate in his summation that 'things weren't quite right'. Granada's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is not a bad film—it is just a disappointing one because the potential was so great. Here was the best Sherlock Holmes of his time, appearing in a lavish film produced by people who respected the original stories and who were renowned for their expertise. What went awry?

Some blame must be placed at the door of the Granada chiefs, who were going through a cheese-paring stage. As one employee of the

company told me, "They seem to say, "Bugger the artistic quality, just keep it cheap." Michael Cox had a real struggle on his hands to keep the project within the parameters of its restricted budget while trying to make the production as effective and sumptuous as ever. It does seem to be the way with television companies—not only Granada—that when a product has proved itself and become commercially successful, the company loses interest in the actual quality of the programme and is happy for the product to ride on its reputation while at the same time cutting its budget.

Many critics of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* would also point a finger at the script when describing the film's weakness. To his credit, Trevor Bowen, who wrote the screenplay, also feels very disappointed by the end result, but believes that the Granada cuts and the weak pacing of the movie are the main culprits. I spoke to him at length about the production. To begin with he made this initial observation:

'I wrote "The Priory School" for Jeremy and that was a tremendous experience. I was extraordinarily lucky that John Madden directed it. He was wonderful. I realised we'd got a film director here and we could actually think film. Therefore I could write differently because I was dealing with someone who understood film. I have to say that most of the time in Brit Tel, as I call it, you don't do that because the directors tend not to be on that wavelength. Actually with Sherlock I was particularly lucky: Peter Hammond is another one who thinks film. And Sarah Hellings too. She directed "The Dying Detective", in the last lot. Sadly this wasn't the case with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.'

Trevor seemed to blame the tight purse strings for the failure to hire John Madden to direct this production. Instead Brian Mills was chosen for the job. He had only directed one Sherlock before, the rather tame 'Silver Blaze'. This also had a Dartmoor background, so perhaps that is why he was chosen. Looking at both 'Silver Blaze' and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* one can perceive what Trevor Bowen means: they are television programmes—not films. It is interesting to note that Brian Mills now directs episodes of the soap opera *Coronation Street*.

Trevor Bowen expressed his thoughts on the Granada economies thus:

'Do you know that Oscar Wilde quote—something like "there is nothing more ludicrous than the sight of British people going through one of their periodic fits of morality"? Well, there's nothing more ludicrous than a television company going through one of its periodic fits of parsimony. They've got this marvellous product with a huge following and they've got *the* classic Holmes story—one of the best known stories the world has ever seen—and they mess it up by not allowing us to do it properly. And one of the great economies was that we couldn't choose our director. It was a great sadness to me.'

The measure by which the purse strings had been tightened can be gauged by the simple fact that while 'The Devil's Foot' had been filmed in Cornwall, by the time the showcase production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was underway, only a few months later, the film crew was based at Brimham Rocks, in Yorkshire, a few hours' drive from Granada's Manchester base. It is an area that doubles very nicely for Devonshire, but nevertheless, it is not Dartmoor.

It was Michael Cox who asked Trevor Bowen to write the two-hour adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Bowen recalled:

'I read the book and I hadn't read it for a long time and I thought that this is the most perfectly told story—the rhythm of it is so wonderful. It releases the information in exactly the right measure all the way through. Actually I tried an experiment. I took the number of pages of the novel and I split them into the sections that would be separated by the commercial breaks—it was about 27 minutes. I knew I had to tell a chunk of the story in that time and it worked almost perfectly. The story is told so well, it has a rhythm that adds to the narrative sequence. You must release the story on film as in the book. It seems to me no one has ever quite done this before. For example, I saw the Hammer film version recently and they start with this daft version of the myth. Now the myth is a myth is a myth. While there is a concern about whether the hound is supernatural or not, if you start with showing the myth of the young girl being chased and about to be raped on the moor by Sir Hugo and then this magical beast appears to rip his throat out, you've immediately given this myth a kind of reality, a credence which is wrong for the story. It should be buried in the mists of time and talked about but not shown, visualised on screen. Once you have done that, you've blown the whole thing, it seems to me, because then you've got to believe in magic and the great thing about the story is the wonder of what is this thing hanging over the moor. In a way it makes it more frightening that it has a completely human agency; that it's the result of someone's hatred and dark ambitions. Conan Doyle tells the story perfectly.'

It was a cold and blustery day in March 1988 when I first met Jeremy Brett. It was in Liverpool at Stanley Dock, a deserted and decrepit dockside building open to the icy elements. It was here that Granada was filming locations for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. A rusty old tub had been craftily dressed up to look the part of the steam ship that brought Sir Henry Baskerville (Kristoffer Tabori) to England. The sequence, which took most of the day to film, lasts for about thirty seconds on screen. Such is television! Extras in various costumes wandered around 'Tilbury Docks', shivering while they waited for a take, their appearance contrasting sin-realistically with the camera crew muffled up against the cold in anoraks and gaudy woolly hats. 'Thermal underwear is a must on location, ' Roy Jackson, the unit manager, assured me.

Eventually I was ushered into Jeremy Brett's location caravan, which was warm, almost tropical, by comparison with the icy blasts. As we talked, he began to make himself up, transforming the actor into the character. Our initial conversation centered around the subtle changes he had brought to the character in the last four films, and then we turned to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Brett was enthusiastic:

'Yesterday was a good day. Thrilling. A special moment that sometimes makes the visual part of doing it more exciting than just reading it. In the beginning of the story, Holmes sees the reflection of Watson in a well-polished coffee pot. Well, I had in the studio yesterday, for the first time, a well-polished coffee pot. Now, no matter where I placed the coffee pot, I couldn't see Watson at all. So I thought, come on Doyle, how's it done? I reckoned he'd got it wrong. It couldn't be done. Perhaps it was a different shaped coffee pot. Then I lifted the lid—and the lid was like a compact mirror reflecting exactly what Watson was doing. So all I had to do was lift the lid, angle myself and I could see him clearly. So sometimes by taking something from the book you learn more.'

I raised the point that this was a very serious interpretation of a comparatively minor point. Couldn't he just have pretended to see Watson?

'You can pretend sometimes but with the kind of audience that Holmes attracts you cannot do it too often. There have been times when perhaps I have done some of the deductions maybe a little too quickly, like the business across the floor in "The Second Stain" and the searching for the bullet in the shingle outside the window in "The Dancing Men". You've got to give it a time span that is possible. You must keep the logic—and the humanity—credible. However, I was pleased with that difficult first scene in *The Hound* with Doctor Mortimer and his dog. Then there was that phrenological aspect. I decided at the last minute that Holmes wouldn't let him run his fingers along his parietal fissure. I treated it as a joke and laughed at his request.'

Contrary to Trevor Bowen's view, Brett told me that he thought it was imperative that within the first ten minutes or so you need to persuade the audience that such a thing as a supernatural Hound is possible.

'Holmes has to allow the audience to believe that he believes it is possible too. Now as a man of logic, that's an enormous jump but he's so disturbed by how disturbed Mortimer is—a doctor and a man of science—that he considers there may be something . . . You see Conan Doyle was flirting with the occult in this one. Remember it was around the time of Stoker's *Dracula*, Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll*, and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. It was a very dark period.'

This point is actually covered in his dialogue. In an early scene, Watson returns from his club to find the Baker Street rooms filled with smoke (*a la* the novel) with Holmes studying a map of Dartmoor. Holmes notes that 'it is a worthy setting, if the Devil did decide to dabble in the affairs of man'. Watson, not too non-plussed by this unusual comment from his logical companion, responds, 'Then you are inclined towards a supernatural

explanation.' Holmes raises an eyebrow but does not reply, and the ambivalence of his response is suitably chilling.

The big question was, of course, how on earth Granada was going to present the phantom Hound. Conan Doyle's description of it is marvellous:

A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish, be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

It is true to say that no film based on this book has come anywhere near to matching that magnificent description. Indeed, the presentation of the spectral beast has been the stumbling block of many productions. In the early stages of the Granada filming, Brett told me:

'It may well be the stumbling block in this one too. I asked Michael if he was getting ready for the Hound and he said that they don't know yet how it's going to be done. I said that I hoped we weren't going end up with a Jack Russell under a magnifying glass.'

It wasn't a Jack Russell: it was a very large Great Dane. But size alone does not make a dog into a fearsome beast. Great Danes are quite sleek for their size and are athletic of movement. Even when tinged with a green phosphorus effect, Granada's dog failed to create a sense of menace. Occasionally we saw its celery-stalk-like legs trotting through the undergrowth, but we never saw its slavering jaws or its wild malevolent eyes. They needed an Arnold Schwarzenegger or a Sylvester Stallone of a dog; instead they got a Robin Williams.

There were problems with the script too. Despite Trevor Bowen's confidence that his Hound adaptation was one of his best works, Brett was more guarded: 'The story has been bled a little too much for my liking. I'm not sure you should bleed a Doyle.'

I take it that what Brett meant by 'bleeding' this particular text was to take some of the gothic chill out of it. Certainly, the film lacks menace; there is no sense of the dark shadow of the Hound cast over all the events. This is implicit in the writing of the novel, but far more difficult to transfer to the screen. Some wonderful moments are missed, partly because of financial constraints and partly because of dull direction. Let me quote two examples to illustrate. To film the chase down Baker Street after Stapleton's cab would, according to Trevor Bowen, have taken something like a sixth

of the budget and therefore was out of the question. As a result a chase down the stairs of a hotel was substituted. Hardly an exciting alternative. However, Bowen told me:

'I wrote the sequence in a more complicated manner than the one we see. What I had was a complex of yards behind the hotel and they were chasing this man through this warren of yards and they lost him when they got to the street. But a lot of it went in the shooting and what was left lacked the language of film'.

I have seen the final shooting script which features this chase as described by Bowen, and it certainly was not translated to the screen as written; but what strikes me about this version of events is that our only concern is whether Holmes will catch this strange bearded fellow who has been observing his client, Sir Henry. In the original novel, we fear for Sir Henry's life. I must add that whoever chose the music to accompany this sequence should be forced to spend a night in Grimpen Mire. It was almost jolly, and the mood of the scene was badly misjudged.

Another disappointing moment occurs when Watson and Sir Henry are out on the moor late at night, tracking down Selden, the escaped convict. (This was a Granada studio set which, strangely, evoked the Twentieth Century Fox set of 1939, in which Basil Rathbone blundered against *papier mâché* boulders and slunk his way through studio fog.) Suddenly they hear the cry of the Hound, and then Watson glimpses 'the man on the tor'. It is a famous moment in the novel, atmospherically illustrated by Sidney Paget in the original book. What we get in the Granada version is a very quick shot of a man moving out of view. It is neither chilling nor atmospheric; it is clumsy and confusing.

One of the perennial problems with adapting this story into a drama is the fact that the central character is away from the action for so long. Trevor Bowen made these observations:

'It is a problem, but what you must do is not subvert it too much—change the structure like some films have. Holmes must disappear and everyone is saying, "Where's Holmes? Where's Jeremy?" What we did with the film was to provoke the viewer to consider what Holmes was actually doing. So we had completely silent scenes of him doing the research into the background of the Baskerville family and environs: who were these people who lived around the moor that Watson was telling him about in his reports? So you saw Holmes going to an astronomer at Greenwich; and there's a lepidopterist, so you saw him go to the Natural Science Museum. So he was a presence in his absence as it were.'

Some of these sequences do not appear in the film; those that do are somewhat mystifying to viewers who don't know the story, and rather

annoying to those who do. As though in desperation, Granada even throws in the scene from 'The Greek Interpreter' showing Holmes walking away from the camera down the platform to be enveloped in mist or steam. These scenes, apparently unrelated to the main action, showing Holmes about some arcane business, really do not work.

At the climax of the original novel, Inspector Lestrade joins the Baker Street duo on the moor to put paid to the Hound, but series regular Colin Jeavons was unavailable to play Lestrade at the time of shooting. In fact, he was contending with a different kind of animal altogether: he was on a national tour with the National Theatre production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. (Eric Porter was also in this production.) Rather than replace Lestrade with another policeman, Granada aided their economies by using Dr Mortimer (Neil Duncan) as the third man, and this was written into the final script.

It can be no surprise that if the writer and two stars were dissatisfied with the film, the critics followed suit. In the normally very charitable *Stage*, Nick Smurthwaite, in a piece cheekily titled 'Barking up the Wrong Tree', had some perceptive and some unjust observations to make about the production after it was shown on British television on 31 August 1988:

Like a child who likes to be read the same Pooh story time and time again, it's not so much the narrative you love as the manner of its telling. For most of its two hours, this latest *Hound* is predictable and plodding, relieved only by some ravishing camerawork and Jeremy Brett's outrageously mannered performance, alive with tics and grimaces. He is aided and abetted by Edward Hardwicke, an actor born to play dear, dependable, dense Watson, ever the panting dog to his master's voice. [*The Hound*] fails to impress as a mystery or thriller ... the biggest let down is the hound (an 11 stone [154 pounds] Great Dane, I'm told) which looks more silly than menacing with its luminous outline. Sillier still is the slaving monster's voice-over, provided by veteran man-of-a-thousand-creatures, Percy Edwards. It was the fifth *Hound of the Baskervilles* old Percy has woofed and snarled.'

The reception in the popular press was no less critical or sneering. Under the heading 'The Disappearing Fizz', Val Sampson wrote in *Today* of the programme's 'lack-lustre appeal'. Martin Cropper in *The Guardian* also used the phrase 'lack-lustre', saying that the adaptation moved at 'an M25 pace'¹⁴. He suggested that the only way to present this 'predictable' tale was to 'as the 1939 movie demonstrated, rattle the thing off in 80 minutes and trowel on the atmosphere'.

If we want a simple explanation as to why Granada's *Hound of the Baskervilles* disappoints, it must hang on that word 'atmosphere'—or the lack of it. There was no texture of Gothic fear, no brooding menace and no sense that our protagonists were in real danger from a glowing dog. There was no atmosphere. However, having talked to individuals involved in the film, and having watched it several times myself, it is plain that the answer is not that clear cut. I am constantly reminded of Jeremy Brett's remarks to me about the show, made in the last year of his life, and quoted earlier: 'So many things weren't quite right . . . We can do better.'

Sadly, we'll never know.

Before completing this chapter, I watched Granada's *Hound of the Baskervilles* yet again. I reiterate: it is not a bad film, but everything about it is so slow—performances are pedestrian, including, at times, Jeremy Brett's. There is no pace or rhythm to the presentation, and the dramatic moments are lost. The dénouement and the shooting of the Hound are perfunctory. It really was the missed opportunity of the whole series of Granada films: to make the definitive *The Hound of the Baskervilles* with the definitive Sherlock Holmes.

Seven

The Secret of Sherlock Holmes

I FIRST HEARD OF THE PLAY *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes* when Jeremy Brett mentioned it to me in passing while we talked in his location caravan in Liverpool in March 1988. At this time I was not used to the typical flamboyant Brettism which rolled effortlessly off the tongue, presenting an idea that was convincing, whole, real, and assured, when in reality it was an idea that had been newly minted in that fertile mind of his. With Jeremy, when the wind was in the right direction, possibilities became certainties, thoughts became realities, and wishes were the truth. It was an endearing quality.

Here's what he told me on that occasion about the drama that eventually became *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*:

'In January next year I open in a Holmes play in Australia. It's a three-hander, me, Watson, and a narrator. I'm hoping to persuade Edward Hardwicke, my Granada Watson, to play the good doctor—there is none better. The plan is to take the play across the States and then bring it into London in the middle of next year.'

Most of that statement bore little relation to the reality of the matter. It was off the top of his head. It pleased him to tell me and it pleased me to hear it—and *that* pleased him, too. There were no plans for Australia or America, but there was a play—which was still being shaped as we spoke. The writer was Jeremy Paul, who had scripted several of the more successful television episodes, notably 'The Musgrave Ritual', which won an award in America. Paul had based the play to some extent on taped discussions he'd had with Jeremy Brett, along with his own ideas stimulated by his long-time fascination with Conan Doyle's hero. I will let Jeremy Paul take up the tale of the play's genesis:

'Jeremy and I went back a long way. The first time I met him was when Pat Garwood, my wife, was in a production of *Beauty and the Beast* that the BBC did way back in the 'sixties. Jeremy played the prince and the beast and was wonderful. Pat and Jeremy struck up a kind of friendship and he came back to our house and played ping-pong late into the night on a number of occasions. We became friends before we worked together. Then I adapted an H. E. Bates story, "An Aspidistra in Babylon", for a Granada series called *Country Matters* and Jeremy played the lead—a kind of young lieutenant in barracks at Dover who seduces the local girl and then abandons her. This was in the early 'seventies. Working on this production secured our friendship, I guess. Although he did quite a lot ⁵ of work in America during the 'seventies, we did meet from time to time. Actually we met up in the States at one point.'

Paul believes that, because of their friendship, it was Jeremy who put forward his name as a writer on the Granada Holmes series. It then seemed a natural step for these two creative people, old friends, to work on a Holmes project—to pool their ideas as they chatted after the day's filming. Paul acknowledges that the germ of the play came from their 'gossip':

'It was the summer of '87 that the idea of the play first came to me and it came about in this fashion. Jeremy reminded me that it was Sherlock Holmes's centenary and we ought to do something about it—a celebratory evening in the theatre with extracts from the canon maybe, or a reading—some form of birthday present. The challenge triggered off something that must have been burrowing away in my subconscious while doing the adaptations. I found myself more and more fascinated by the beginnings of the stories wherein lay this extraordinary, detailed Victorian friendship between two men, which carried no modern sexual overtones at all. It was just friendship uncomplicated in its nature, something that perhaps our hurrying world has lost sight of. Added to this was Conan Doyle's sharp insight into the rich tapestry of the social and moral climate of his times. So often these openings had to be skimmed in the television versions, in order to move on quickly to the "case". It was like stumbling across a trunkful of treasures in an attic and it is possible that Conan

Doyle himself was unaware of their value. He was often self-deprecating about his talents.'

Paul told Brett that rather than concoct a stiff and starchy evening of readings, he wanted to write a play focussed on the Holmes and Watson relationship using, for the most part, Conan Doyle's own words. Brett was thrilled at the prospect and, as Jeremy Paul noted with a little apprehension, commissioned the play for himself. This sent Paul back to the canon to scour it for relevant material for his drama:

'I plunged headlong down what I knew was a thorny and well-trodden path. I didn't care. I plundered the canon for bits from this story and that, discovering along the way Conan Doyle's marvellous ear for theatrical language and humour. And I had another bonus. I was able to tap Jeremy's own knowledge of Holmes through a series of tapes he made—a knowledge gleaned from five years of playing the part. Brilliantly he filled in gaps, such as the mystery of Holmes's unrecorded childhood (an actor has to resolve these things), or his inner feelings, for instance about The Woman, Irene Adler. The tapes were to prove invaluable.'

I suspect that talking in detail about the character with whom he had a love/hate relationship (particularly at this time) must have been to some extent a cathartic exercise for Jeremy. When we last met, he told me of his vision of Holmes's childhood. It was chilling in its vividness:

'I crawled into every corner of my imagination to find out what made [Holmes]. I have this whole history of him as a child which I used to fill this chasm—to find out what he's made of. He's very private. To help to discover what he's like inside I had this whole story of his life. He was tied very tight as a child in the cot as they used to in those days to keep them quiet. Children were seen but not heard—especially in the Holmes household which I've always placed in my mind in Cornwall . . . very remote. A bleak house. Never knew his father at all until he was 21. Saw him but never spoke to him. He had an elder brother who was fat and a little bit far ahead of him. They didn't have much in common either. They were kissed by their mother on her way down to dinner, but that's all. Isolation from an early age. Typical Victorian upbringing. I think that he had more in common with his mother—she was the brains—but, of course, women were not allowed to say much in those days and this reserve rubbed off on Sherlock. His father was a fat, ex-army toad, I think.

'Anyway, he escaped to Eton—or one of the major public schools. He was a spidery person, with no colour in his face, no friends—scared of friendship—but brilliant at certain subjects. Brilliant at fencing and boxing, but always the person who walked away from personal encounters. He was devastatingly unattractive: white as a sheet, spotty probably, with all the complications of puberty and no one there to guide him through it. Probably loved singing and joined the choir.

'University. I would plump for Oxford. Oxford is darker; Cambridge is too full of light. Then brilliance—growing—mind developing—debating societies. Probably saw a girl—a woman, whom he fancied, but she didn't see him. That one rejection did it. The one time he placed himself in a vulnerable situation and to see her turn away and choose someone else snapped the door shut like a steel trap, never to be opened again. What should he do now? Return home to his family and take up some dreary duties associated with the estate. He wanted to escape that. Mycroft, ahead of him, had escaped: he'd waddled out of University and managed to get a junior post in the current government. Mycroft had also joined a club only a Holmes would join—one in which no one spoke. Sherlock, isolated as he was now, forced himself to find his own way—his own job—and therefore become himself.'

I was astounded at this brilliant dissection of the Holmes background. Jeremy Brett had not only, with a laser-like sharpness, carved out a credible and richly detailed youth for Sherlock Holmes, an acting rock on which he could build his characterisation, he had also touched areas within his own persona. There are in this litany resounding echoes from Brett's own life. His love of music and singing is a simple example—'Probably loved singing and joined the choir.' To me the most telling phrase refers to Holmes's father: 'ex-army toad'. Brett's relationship with his own soldier-father was a difficult one. He disapproved of his son's chosen profession

and insisted he change his name from Huggins if he were to appear on the stage so as not to disgrace the family name. The fact that Jeremy never quite received the full approbation of his father pained him for the rest of his life. There must have been a coldness there that a warm, outgoing fellow like Jeremy could not understand. He wrote to a fan in 1990 about his success in the role of Sherlock Holmes: 'Who would have thought that Jeremy Huggins of Warwickshire, the son of a soldier, would win such an accolade?' That phrase 'the son of a soldier' clearly shows that the scar of early rejection had not healed.

Brett's tapes were invaluable to Jeremy Paul in the creation of *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*, and he blended Conan Doyle with Brett's observations and his own creative juices to create this special drama:

'I wanted it to be a play about friendship but there had to be a mystery to solve. How could any man allow his closest friend to believe he was dead for three whole years? Therein lay the enigma and the key to Holmes's complex personality. If I could unravel that. . .

"The "secret" of Holmes and Moriarty presented itself as something so thrilling and, at the same time, so obvious, that I thought it must have been explored many times, if only as a hypothesis. I love this Victorian idea of doppelgangers, Jekyll and Hyde—the two sides to the human personality. I checked with a couple of Sherlockian friends who reassured me that I was on relatively new ground. The idea had once been proffered humorously by A. G. MacDonell in *Punch* in the 'thirties, but never followed up. That was good enough for me. After the play opened, I learned that the concept that Holmes was Moriarty also forms the basis of Michael Dibdin's novel *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story*.

'One element of the text was important to me—something I remembered from Michael Cox's first briefing—and that was to do justice to Watson's character. A brave soldier who has seen the horrors of war, a general practitioner who understands the complex psychology of human beings, and a man whom his friend describes as "the one fixed point in a changing age". I needed Watson to have his day, to play Holmes at his own game and not be found wanting.

'I wrote the play in about six weeks, I was so high on the project. By contrast, it took me about nine to ten weeks to write "Wisteria Lodge" for the telly. Anyway, I rang Jeremy and said if you get over here by five o'clock the last page of the play will be off the press. He was there by five o'clock and in fact he had to wait fifteen minutes until the last page was printed. He sat and read the play instantly. He gave the most wonderful response any writer could wish for. Usually you write a play and three years later four people have deigned to read it. In typical Jeremy fashion he said, "We start tomorrow! We rehearse."

The piece was intended merely as a Sunday night *divertissement* at the Mayfair Theatre in London. The audience was to be made up of friends, family, and contacts in the profession. Jeremy Paul continues:

'We went into a kind of rehearsal situation more or less straight away. Ted Hardwicke wasn't available so we got a splendid actor called Sebastian Stride to play a youngish Watson, aged about 36. Initially the play was a three hander. The idea at this time was still that the piece was a concert performance, a Sunday evening entertainment. So I got roped in to play Conan Doyle in the wings and several other parts, including the ghost of Moriarty pretending to be a train!'

Wait a minute, Mr Paul. Did I hear you correctly? Playing a train? How did you do that?

'I chuffed grotesquely across the stage as a train—hopefully a Victorian train. I brought the house down. I got the round of a lifetime. It was sheer cheek and nerve, spurred on by Jeremy's sense that everything and anything was possible.

'We actually rehearsed for six weeks at The Oval in the Granada rooms. I directed it. Jeremy used the techniques he had picked up from Ingmar Bergman where the director's chair is empty and various members of the company pass through it at certain times. I would sometimes vacate the chair and Jeremy would take it. I would become Holmes. Sebastian would take it and I would become Watson. Then Jeremy would become Watson. . We explored the whole play from any number of different points of view. I remember one wonderful morning when Robert Stephens came in and took the chair and watched what we were doing. He was wonderfully helpful and perceptive. It was a thrilling morning of theatre.'

So the curtain eventually went up at the Mayfair Theatre to an invited audience, including Dame Jean Conan Doyle, members of the Granada team, and a sprinkling of impresarios. It was a magical evening. But Jeremy Paul admitted that he could neither be clear nor objective about the occasion:

'I was so terrified. I did a sort of introductory piece. It was an extraordinary event. We all went way over the top but it was so well received. Duncan Weldon, the impresario, was there, and said that, as long as he could get me off the stage, he would be prepared to put it on.'

After the euphoria of the evening there was a lull. The Granada series went back into production and the idea of the play seemed to drift away. Jeremy Brett also began to ponder whether he really wanted to tie himself to the rigorous and demanding shackles of a West End play—six nights a week and two matinees. During this lull, Jeremy Paul had rearranged the play to eliminate the narrator and the moving train; there were now to be just Holmes and Watson on stage. This amputation and breaking of certain textual bones sharpened the play and increased its theatrical appeal. In the end it was Paul's agent, suitably impressed by the slimmed-down version of

the play, who pushed for its production. She contacted director Patrick Garland, who responded enthusiastically to the play, and suddenly things began to take off.

The play opened in Guildford under the title *A Case for Sherlock Holmes*, with Hardwicke restored to the role of Watson, but by its second venue, in Richmond, it had been re-titled *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes*. Included in the billing was the line 'The TV stars in a new stage thriller'. Audiences had been expecting, and in fact continued to expect, a straightforward Holmes mystery: client with problem, old house, strange behaviour from servants, a luminous animal perhaps, some danger, and a deductive denouement. The phrase 'A Case' seemed to underline these expectations, so it was dropped. It was not just the audiences who missed the mystery, as it were. Jeremy Paul admitted that:

'Duncan Weldon, the producer, was always worried that it didn't have "the case". You see he had billed it as *A Mystery and A Thriller*. That was just Duncan trying to get an audience. I told him that you cannot put another second of burden on those two actors at that pitch by including a standard Holmes mystery. You have to take the play for what it is. And dear Jeremy agreed. Because even if you fashioned a case that only used the two characters, it would be enormously difficult and it just adds to the problems of dialogue and credibility. We couldn't really use other actors in the play or it would change the shape of it—overbalance it.'

The first act was pure Conan Doyle—a wonderful weaving by Jeremy Paul of threads from the canon; then the second act developed the 'Secret', which was that Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime, was the creation of Holmes's fevered brain:

HOLMES: I propose to offer you . . . the hypothesis . . . that Professor Moriarty did not exist. That I invented him.

WATSON: (a short laugh) My dear Holmes ...

HOLMES: (silencing him) You must challenge it at every point, let nothing escape you. I have laid in your favourite claret and the tobacco is in the slipper. Are you game for it?

WATSON: Why, yes, of course. If you insist...

HOLMES: So. It was in the summer of '87 that the idea first came to me. It may have sprung from one of my black fits, quite probably it did, I forget . . . but its practicality was purely logical. I am an acknowledged expert in all matters criminal. If I could create a master ... (He pauses, then continues with a supreme effort of will) ... a master mind which could draw to it, like the spider, all the nefarious flies, into its web, then how much easier it would be to keep my own finger on the pulse.

Such was the pastiche invention found in the second act. Jeremy Paul remarked:

'I knew I had to fly on my own in the second act and just hope and trust that I created a pastiche where you couldn't recognise the join. I hoped that one of the fun puzzles, especially with the buffs, would be "what's Doyle and what's Paul and does it all sound of a piece?"'

I wondered how the mentally fragile Jeremy Brett was coping with just finishing a Granada series and plunging into this most demanding of parts, pushing him to create an acting *tour de force* every evening.

The press, in general, was not impressed by the play but enjoyed the performances. Charles Osborne in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote:

There have been, over the years, some notable impersonations of Holmes.

My own favourite, in those delightfully unauthentic Universal B movies of the '40s has always been Basil Rathbone, but Jeremy Brett's assumption of the role (which I have avoided on TV) now severely tests my fidelity to Rathbone.

Brett's strange and somewhat Hamlet-like air of abstraction, which blossoms into a baroque extravagance whenever he speaks of Moriarty, or after he has given himself a fix, seems absolutely right for Holmes, as is also the faint but deliberate whiff of high camp which hovers discreetly over the characterisation. Edward Hardwicke plays Watson, not in the Nigel Bruce tradition of amiable old duffer, but as the intelligent, likeable army doctor envisaged by Conan Doyle.

Michael Billington, the well-respected critic, was less kind writing in *The Guardian*:

. . . Jeremy Paul's play is a bleak, short, (100 minutes with interval) two hander desperately starved of plot. . . . Jeremy Brett renders Holmes's lassitude and depression with considerable actorish style. He flings himself into leather-backed armchairs and upon unsuspecting nouns and verbs with panache and describes his visits to Tibet, Persia, and Mecca with the weariness of one who has taken a day excursion to Margate.

But Holmes as psychological wreck is much less interesting than the genius detective in whom Auden said, scientific curiosity is raised to the status of heroic passion. The joke here is that it is Edward Hardwicke's staunch Watson who gets to do most of the sleuthing ...

Indirectly Billington puts his finger on the problem with a Holmes stage play. The general public wants a Holmes investigation set before it, while the *aficionados* prefer to see a close-up of the character of Holmes, an analytical psychological investigation rather than a criminal one. This viewpoint is exemplified by Irving Wardle's comment in *The Times*: 'Brett and Hardwicke would be excellent value if they had a story to tell.'

Peter Kemp in *The Independent* perhaps summed up the consensus view:

The only solid pleasure in this exiguous evening—playing little more than an hour—is the acting. Jeremy Brett's pallid neurasthenic Holmes successfully transfers from screen to stage all the fastidiously mannered effects of his television playing of the role. Edward Hardwicke's personation of Watson seems so stalwartly genuine that you feel even Holmes's hawk-like gaze could not spot a single give-away touch of falsity in his performance.

After the first-night notices came the slog and grind of eight performances a week. Jeremy Paul observed:

'The play was an enormous strain on both actors. Ted was an absolute rock. He enjoyed the chance to get into town and see his name in lights, which was his father's great forte. But it wasn't always easy for Ted with Jeremy, who could vary the mood to some extent. Jeremy would never lose the lines—ever—but he did like to experiment with the text. But you see that was a part of the way certain actors like Jeremy Brett and Robert Stephens see theatre; that to stave off the boredom of the endless mechanical repetition of a role they have to re invent and re-dare. In doing so you may miss. And on certain nights Jeremy would be the first to admit that he'd missed. But he was always thinking about the play. I never got a sense that he was bored with it—or tired of it. He kept saying, "I find new things every night." In that spirit he would change things and Ted, the wonderful goalkeeper, gathering the back passes without temperament, would cope magnificently. They had a magic chemistry between them. Jeremy would play something quite different to see if that was interesting and Ted would always be there—Watson would always be there. It was all coming out of the spirit of the play: Holmes would be capricious, mischievous, while Watson would be dependable, loyal, and ready for anything. So I saw Jeremy's experiments as positive and I got tremendous thrills and fizzes out of new happenings when I caught the play. But never happenings that deserted the text which is enormously satisfying for a writer.'

The latter half of the play deals with the actual secret—the fact that Holmes has created Moriarty out of his own imagination. In essence, this section tells of a man suffering a nervous breakdown, cruelly mirroring, to some extent, Jeremy Brett's own personal situation.

WATSON: If you did indeed create this monster, then what prompted you to destroy him?

HOLMES: I could not live with him. It was either him or me. And I had contemplated both solutions.

Jeremy Paul believed that the play was a kind of 'nightly therapy' for Brett:

'I think it staved off an awful lot of things that would have happened if he hadn't been performing. Whatever the beginnings of things that were happening in his life during the day, he always got himself to the theatre and sort of therapeutically channelled

something through Holmes on the stage. On some level that was often what was seen on stage in Holmes that night. I mean Jeremy and I talked all the time, often late at night after the performances, and more often than not he would say, "this play is saving me."

Mentally, the play may have been therapeutic for Brett, but physically it was cruelly punishing. At this time his heart condition worsened and the drugs he was taking caused him to swell with water retention. He had trouble breathing and, indeed, moving. Edward Hardwicke remembers this period vividly:

'Jeremy was tremendously brave, for at one time he was having such difficulty that we had to cut some of the swift exits and entrances he made during the course of the play because the strain of it was too much for him. We just brought the lights up and down instead to indicate a time lapse. He couldn't get the air into his lungs—and yet he still had this amazing voice. I used to stand there and just watch the perspiration just pouring off him. I kept telling him that he must go to his doctor. He was worried that he'd have to give the play up—there were no understudies— and that would jeopardise his insurance rating. He was terrified of losing insurance cover which in turn would affect his television work. However, eventually he did go and the doctor said immediately that he would not be responsible for him if he did another performance. He was told that he must go into hospital immediately. He wouldn't do that, but he said he'd go to a health farm. I think they drew off about two stone in liquid from him in a matter of three days.'

The play closed for a fortnight while Brett recuperated, an event that fortunately was missed by the press, and on his return he was for a time much fitter and a little leaner. The concern and worry that Edward Hardwicke felt for Jeremy, along with his own mammoth part, put a strain on him which was greatly added to by Brett's increasingly difficult behaviour resulting from his manic depression. As Hardwicke noted:

'The most difficult time I experienced with Jeremy was during the course of the play. It was joy to begin with—for the first month or two—and ' then our partnership became a little strained. His performance became somewhat wayward at one point during the run. We were great friends and totally able to say what we liked to each other—to some extent. But to comment on his performance was a little difficult. However, I said, "Jeremy, that moment used to be so wonderful and now it doesn't seem to work." One had to approach it that way You couldn't just say that you're not doing the same performance—and, frankly, if Holmes really behaved like that, Watson wouldn't stay under the same roof with him a moment longer. I must make it clear, however, that this was not Jeremy— this was his illness acting for him. The illness is like that creature in the film *Alien*—always protecting itself. The illness protects itself the whole time. It will lie, behave badly and do all sorts of unpleasant things. The moment you start thinking it's the person rather than the condition, you'll be in some difficulty handling the situation. Jeremy, who normally was such an

immensely generous man, would be turned, by the illness, into something quite different. He could then be black and harsh. During the run, it got to a stage where we were not speaking at all. Then he suddenly rang me up one night in a fury—absolute bile came down the phone. I knew it wasn't Jeremy really. That creature was speaking for him. I sat up all night thinking about it. We had another four months to do on the play. By six o'clock in the morning I had written him a twenty page letter. We had a matinee that day and I went into his dressing room, gave him the letter and said, "Jeremy, I don't want to discuss anything, I just want you to read this." He read the first page of this long, long letter and then he smiled and said, "Oh darling, I'm sorry . . ." And everything was fine. But I knew there was no way we could actually discuss it; it had to be on paper. He had all sorts of misconceptions: he thought I didn't want to do the play, I didn't want to do the series, I didn't want to act with him.

'Looking back, I think I had been critical, but it had become very hard to play the part on stage because of what was happening off stage. As the run had progressed, he used to play Holmes as though he was on cocaine from the moment the curtain went up. In the early days, he played Holmes superbly and when Holmes did get high on the cocaine, he was brilliant in what he did with the moment. It was frighteningly effective the way he conveyed this effect. But that then slowly began to invade the whole performance. I remember, he used to quote a line from *Twelfth Night* and, as the run went on, it got longer and longer and finally he was doing the whole opening speech: "If music be the food of love." Duncan Weldon came in one night and said, "What the hell's going on?"'

By the time the play went on tour in the autumn of 1989, after a year's run at Wyndham's Theatre in the West End, things were on a more even keel. But the two actors had to encounter another difficulty: acting in and filling large provincial theatres. Wyndham's is a compact, intimate theatre, ideally suited to this two-handed play, whereas some of the Victorian theatres Brett and Hardwicke encountered on the tour were vast. Hardwicke commented:

'Suddenly we were playing in these huge auditoriums: two actors banging around in such large spaces. I remember our week in Manchester. It was a very big stage and one was worried about being heard, let alone conveying any subtlety.'

I saw and thrilled to the play at Richmond before it hit London and then saw it several times at Wyndham's. It did change on each viewing—never quite as good as the previous performance. The Richmond show was the jewel. Finally I saw it at the Bradford Alhambra—a beautiful theatre, but an enormous one, where the delicate and personal drama of *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes* was rather swamped by the space. It is a real pity that the show was never filmed. Brett talked of the idea, and of opening up the play a little, using real locations, but while the television series was in production, the project was not viable.

It had been an ordeal for both actors. To carry a play for so long, for so many performances, while battling with private problems was no picnic, despite the adulation and applause. But Edward Hardwicke is adamant he would not have missed the experience of acting on stage with Jeremy for the world:

'I was immensely fond of Jeremy and I owe him a great deal. He persuaded me to do the play and it changed my life. I was able to buy my home in France with my earnings. I called the place Wyndham's. I was terribly keen for him to visit us there, but sadly he was never able to do so. He would have adored it if I could have got him there.'

Edward Hardwicke told me an amusing anecdote about Brett, which in a sense sums up the kindness and the sometimes infuriating quality of the man. During the run at Wyndham's, a lady who had connections with the Albert Hall came to see the play and also came backstage to meet the stars. Some weeks later she wrote to Jeremy with an offer of free tickets to see Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., and Liza Minelli in concert at the Albert Hall. Brett wrote back thanking the lady for her offer but told her that he and Ted would be too tired after an evening show to attend.

'He was thinking of me but at the same time he never asked me if I would like to go. It never crossed his mind I might not be that tired. I would have crawled on my hands and knees to see that trio! I didn't find out about the offer until it was too late. Jeremy just mentioned it in passing.'

Eight

The Casebook

THE *SECRET OF SHERLOCK HOLMES* opened at Wyndham's Theatre in the West End in October 1988 and ran for twelve months—a testimony to the attraction that Sherlock Holmes and Jeremy Brett held for the public. Following the London run, the two actors began a gruelling three month national tour which took them to all parts of Britain. By Christmas 1989, they were both on their knees. It was time for a break. Brett and Hardwicke went their separate ways, knowing that they would meet up in the spring of 1990 to begin work on the new Granada series, *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

Jeremy was still suffering from his manic depression, and shortly before he began filming *The Casebook* he had to be brought home from a holiday abroad by his son. This was not generally known at the time, but Edward Hardwicke noticed that Jeremy was very subdued in the rehearsals for the first episode, 'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax':

'I had never seen him as tentative and unsure as he was in that first ten days or so of rehearsal, worrying about lines and how to pitch them. Because his delivery was so like a machine gun he had to be absolutely on top of the words and it was the only time I saw him struggling. But he was terribly good in the end. Once we started filming he was fine. He is one of those miraculous people who can put themselves together and get on with it. Subsequently, he told me that he had been ill and had been on a "downer". Some of the filming of "Carfax" took place in the Lake District, which Jeremy loved. The scenery and the pleasant spring weather did much to raise his spirits.'

I spent a day at Granada Studios watching filming on 'Carfax', and it was a fascinating and illuminating visit. I saw at first-hand the organised chaos of television. The morning was spent on just one brief scene which occurs at the beginning of the film. Brett had to knock a small model figure from the mantelpiece in the sitting room and it had to fall on a pile of scattered newspapers in a certain position so as to alert Holmes to a particular news item. There was no dialogue. For all sorts of reasons—faulty sound, wrongly placed shadows, the figure not falling correctly—Jeremy had to do this scene time after time after time. He did the takes with

humour, good grace, and smiling patience. It took over two hours to obtain this twenty-second clip.

After lunch we were whisked to an outside location, a graveyard near the Manchester studios to shoot the climax of the film. This piecemeal arrangement of shooting scenes in no sequential order must be very difficult for actors to cope with. Rather like a juggler with several balls in the air, he has to see the overall pattern of the flow, while at the same time concentrating on handling one specific ball at a time. One can see that with this procedure of moving from one part of the story to another without any narrative logic, the main actors have to know their scripts very well.

The filming in the graveyard went smoothly, but there was, inevitably, a great deal of hanging around. Two or three children gathered and, seeing 'men in funny suits', investigated further. They recognised 'Sherlock Holmes' and asked for his autograph. Jeremy was more than happy to oblige and chatted easily for a few minutes with them. One extra, an elderly lady who was playing a corpse found in a coffin, wandered around, pale-faced and wearing a Victorian shroud, while the shot was being set up. When they were ready for a take, she asked director John Madden if he wanted her with her teeth in or out!

Michael Cox was back in the producer's chair for this series, and Jeremy was pleased to be close to him again. But after filming twenty-six of the stories, it had become harder to pick tales that were strong enough to make good television. Two of the stories in particular caused Michael some problems: 'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax' and 'The Creeping Man'. In Conan Doyle's story, a great deal of 'Carfax' is set in Switzerland. However, the Granada budget would no longer stretch to Switzerland, and compromises had to be made, with the result that the 'foreign' location became the Lake District. Once that major change had been allowed, other minor liberties were taken with the story and characters by writer Trevor Bowen. Purists may have been unhappy with the film, but what emerged was a thrilling mystery. There were good scenes between Holmes and Watson, and thankfully we saw Holmes doing some detective work, an aspect of the films that began to fade after this series.

Brett's features were still suitably Sherlockian, although he was fatter than he had been and looked noticeably more haggard. One was beginning to see a difference between the man observed at the window looking down on

Baker Street in the opening credits and the man acting in the episode. Of course, there was a seven-year time gap and, sadly, no one stays the same.

Edward Hardwicke recalls that filming the series went smoothly, 'although some of the stories were not quite as strong as those from the previous series because they'd used the best ones up'. Michael Cox, happy to be a hands-on producer again, wrote a piece for The Northern Musgraves Sherlock Holmes Society about the series. Here is an extract from *The Ritual*, No.7, Spring 1991:

Just as in *The Adventures* we round the rest of the canon and again for *The Return*, this time we chose stories which seemed to me the best and most dramatic of those remaining after seven years of filming. The 'we' in this case included two script editors and the writers who had, in the end, to deliver screenplays which were exciting, entertaining, and possible to achieve. 'Possible' meaning, as you might guess, in terms of the budget. In the nine teen-nineties there is no chance of going to Switzerland again for locations and we found our one exotic setting in a quarry near Bolton! [Flashback scenes set in Australia in 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery'.]

The writers were old friends: John Hawkesworth who started *The Adventures* with me back in 1983; Jeremy Paul, another veteran; Gary Hopkins; . . . T.R. Bowen and Robin Chapman. This last contributor, who has adapted both 'The Illustrious Client' and 'The Creeping Man', is an old friend of mine but new to Granada's Holmes...

We began with a happy reunion between Trevor Bowen who provided the script for 'The Priory School' and John Madden who directed that episode. They worked together on the script of 'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax' for which I offered them a striking location in the Lake District to stand in for Baden or Lausanne. Their own solution to the location problem was, however, better than mine. Let the Lakes be our own Lakes, an ideal place for Watson to go on holiday and report on the people he meets there to Holmes in Baker Street. The result is quite different from the original story although the version meets Doyle's at several key points and is, I hope, true to the spirit if not the letter of the familiar tale.

We can see from that final sentence the difficulty in which the Granada team now found itself. With the best stories already filmed, they were left with weak vessels which needed shoring up or rebuilding with new timbers. The original premise, to produce the authentic Conan Doyle Sherlock Holmes stories true not only to the spirit but also the letter, had to be compromised. No one is really to blame, unless it is the viewing public who wanted more Holmes films no matter what, and/or the greedy executives who wanted to keep the Sherlock bandwagon rolling in order to cash in on its international appeal. Actually, in this series, the last in which Michael Cox was involved, he worked wonders to keep the stories as Doylean as possible. Cox continued:

My location suggestion for 'Thor Bridge' was rather more successful and I wonder if Watson was hiding something when he told us that Thor Place was in Hampshire. I believe you will find that there is nothing in that county remotely resembling the home Neil Gibson bought in England. Whereas in Cheshire ...

I tried to persuade John Hawkesworth to adapt 'The Three Garridebs' for the new series but he side-stepped it on perfectly reasonable grounds that it is a re-run of 'The Red-Headed League' which he scripted for *The Adventures*. Instead he chose 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery' which he and I overlooked before. Or had we? It's one of those stories—and there are at least a dozen of them—which depends on a flashback to another time and another place. In this case the place is on the other side of the world and we were very lucky to find a lookalike for Gold Rush Australia as near to Manchester as we did. We imported the horses, the covered wagons, the guns, the stunt team, and tons of sand but we were unable to import the weather. And on Tuesday 5 June 1990, the unalterably scheduled day for Black Jack of Ballarat to make his pile, it rained from dawn to dusk. But then it does rain in Australia sometimes, I believe.

Both 'Thor Bridge' and 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery' are more faithful adaptations than 'Lady Frances Carfax'; Jeremy Paul has transposed some events in the first and John Hawkesworth has simplified the second a little. 'The Illustrious Client' is perhaps the most faithful of all. . . .

The last two films to be made are substantial reworkings of the original stories. This will no doubt cause some grief among Sherlock fundamentalists. Let me make my excuses and ask you to put the authorised versions out of your mind for a couple of hours. When in 'Shoscombe Old Place', Holmes says, 'He thought it was his mistress and he found it was a stranger. Dogs don't make mistakes,' and Watson replies, 'But it was the voice of a man,' it seems to me that the case is over. And that crucial scene occurs only two thirds of the way through the story. 'The Creeping Man' presents an even more difficult problem: we know from the start that there is something odd about the Professor, that he creeps and crawls around his own home and menaces his daughter in the middle of the night. There is hardly a mystery for Holmes to solve, only a diagnosis to be made. So Robin Chapman has offered him a puzzle about the identity of the creature who terrifies Edith and the theft of primates from British zoos. . . .

One can note from this dissection of the stones how Michael Cox aimed to keep a good balance between the demands of a popular drama series, a restricted budget, and a concern for Doylean fidelity. It was a balancing act that Jeremy Brett admired and respected.

In general, Brett was excellent in this series. He had passed through his 'I hate Sherlock' phase and settled into playing the character without regret or angst. At times his gestures were a little theatrical, over the top, but whether this was a result of his having played the character on stage for a year, with the result that he was having difficulty bringing the performance down for television, or whether it was a lack of firm direction, is now difficult to assess. He did tell me that there were certain things he did in this

series that he wished he hadn't. What surprised me was that after playing the character for so long and being recognised as the definitive Sherlock Holmes, he still took direction on how to play a scene: 'My dear boy, with directors, I am like Bambi! I just lay down and say, "Tell me what to do."' Sometimes they told him to do the most inappropriate things. A good example of these strange excesses is found in 'The Creeping Man' when Holmes stubs his cigarette out in his half-eaten boiled egg—an action that Brett came to regret as being totally inappropriate to the character of Holmes.

The stand-out show in *The Casebook* was Robin Chapman's adaptation of 'The Illustrious Client'. It was a good script and the villainous Baron Gruner, who collects women, was played with style and malevolent panache by Anthony Valentine.

The British press was pleased with the series. Alan Coren in *The Mail on Sunday* greeted it with delight: '*The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*, returning to ITV for what are bound to be six glorious weeks'. He found Jeremy Brett's performance 'still so superlative that no superlatives of mine are adequate to describe it'. Marcus Berkmann in *The Daily Mail* praised the series' continuing high standards and commented on Brett's 'fruity performance'. Andrew Cowen in *The Stage* stated that Granada had liberated Sherlock Holmes from 'the *Boy's Own* world' he had once inhabited and noted that Brett's 'Gothic demeanour' added a 'charisma' which is so often lacking in lesser portrayals of the part.

However, a perceptive note was struck by Caroline Hendrie in *The Daily Express*. She regretted that Brett had 'run out of really good material to apply his genius to'. Whether this journalist meant Sherlock Holmes's genius as a detective or Jeremy Brett's genius as an actor is unclear. Perhaps it is a comment that is symptomatic of how actor and character were often viewed as one. That is genius.

Nine

The Strange Case of

Stretching the Blackmailer

IT WAS EDWARD HARDWICKE who told me that Granada had, for some time, been thinking about 'two-hour Sherlocks before they actually took the plunge'. There had even been talk of a movie but it seems that is all it was—talk. Ostensibly, the thinking behind extending the showing time from one hour to two was so that the stories could 'breathe more': the atmosphere of London could be captured to better effect in the longer time and the Holmes and Watson relationship could be explored in greater detail. (This aspect certainly never materialised.) I suspect the real reason concerned the commercialism of a two-hour package.

Of course, there was also the Morse factor. The very successful detective series featuring Colin Dexter's grumpy but erudite Oxford Chief Inspector was shot in two-hour episodes. This series began quietly in Britain in 1987, but by the time the second series was transmitted the following year it was required viewing. Viewers were cancelling their arrangements for the evening to sit down at eight o'clock and immerse themselves in the world of Oxford crime, real beer, classical music, and convoluted puzzles. Despite the obvious differences between the two sleuths, and their disparate settings, it can be supposed that they appeal to similar audiences. This must have been part of the thinking at Granada. If Central (the TV company which produced the *Inspector Morse* series for the ITV network) could grab fourteen million viewers with a two-hour Morse, surely Granada could do the same with a two-hour Sherlock? The problem was, of course, that the Morse films were based on tightly-plotted novels of two hundred pages or so; all that Granada had left were bottom-of-the-barrel Conan Doyle tales averaging around twenty pages.

There was also another shift of emphasis at this time: Michael Cox had left the scene altogether. He had gone off to set up another detective series based on the Maigret books, but it was an unhappy experience for him, and he left Granada shortly afterwards. The Holmes series was now totally in the hands of June Wyndham Davies. She saw her role as a film maker and she would, I think, be the first to agree that she never had quite the affinity with Sherlock Holmes that Michael Cox had. She saw her mission with the two-hour shows as 'making feature films for television'. She was also under

instruction from the top to make 'pretty pictures' and 'to cut down on the dialogue'. The latter instruction, regarding a Sherlock Holmes film, reveals a crassness and an ignorance that is as astounding as it is stupid.

Jeremy was never quite sure how he felt about the two-hour shows. His reaction to them depended on how he felt on the day. Broadly he approved of them when he was filming them, but in retrospect he thought they did not work. On the set of *The Eligible Bachelor*, the last of the three two-hour movies, he told me: 'Two hours give you a chance to breathe real details into the plots and, of course, Victorian England is loved by the world and we're able to show more of it in two hours.'

However, in our last interview together in the spring of 1995 he had revised his views:

'The two hour ones were a mistake. Not the *Blackmailer*. I thought the *Blackmailer* one was good, apart from my kissing scene, which was all wrong. But in the two hours we got too far away from Doyle. They had Holmes becoming someone else. I had to pull back some of the writing, but a lot of things got through which I now regret.'

I would certainly agree with Jeremy that *The Master Blackmailer*, the first two-hour film, was the best; and indeed it is a good film.

The Master Blackmailer is Charles Augustus Milverton, 'the king of all the blackmailers', who is probably Conan Doyle's greatest villain. Unlike Professor Moriarty, he really does get the better of Sherlock Holmes, forcing him to abandon brainwork and deduction and assume the role of common burglar. Although this is an entertaining story, one of the most popular in the canon, 'The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton' is not one of Sherlock Holmes's shining hours; yet it was the one case which Brett admitted to me in 1988 that he really wanted to do. He got his wish.

What is amazing, however, is how this slight, twelve-page story became a two-hour Sherlock Holmes special. Screenwriter Jeremy Paul observed that, in essence, it is a three-scene story: the Milverton visit to Holmes, the burglary and murder, and the Baker Street denouement. Looked at in these terms it is not much on which to base one hundred minutes of screen time. Paul certainly had a difficult task to stretch the material, while attempting to stay close to the spirit of Conan Doyle. With this in mind, it is interesting to consider how so many of the episodes of the Granada series have reflected the rhythm and structure of the original

stories, even when they have been altered. Much of this is due to the genius of Conan Doyle's writing. However, 'Milverton' is, in many ways, an exception. As already noted, it is short and disappointing in terms of Sherlock Holmes's detective work; but embedded in the text there are tantalising hints of untold tragedies and scenarios surrounding this master blackmailer. Paul decided to tell the untold. He teased out threads from the original to weave into a new, broader tapestry—a tapestry that presents graphically the full effect of this evil genius on the lives of his victims. Set into this tapestry is the story of the lady who finally ends the life of this monster Milverton by firing five bullets into his 'marble heart'. We witness the commencement of her tragedy and see how her resentment and hatred ferment, finally bubbling over into fury and murderous intent. It is very satisfying to understand the reason for the tears and anger in her final confrontation with Milverton; so much so that, as I am sure Conan Doyle intended, we pull the trigger along with her.

Paul's dramatisation allows us an insight into the dark side of Victorian life. Colonel Dorking, for example, is betrayed by his homosexual lover on the eve of his marriage to Lady Charlotte Miles. Dorking has refused to pay Milverton for his indiscreet notes and consequently his secret love is revealed, forcing him to take 'the soldier's way out'. 'All these scenes are new, yet they have germinated from Conan Doyle's text,' Jeremy Paul observed. 'I have added nothing that is not hinted at in the original story.'

With these developments, the writer was able to expand Holmes's involvement with the case, actually creating a mystery for him to solve. Therefore as the film opens, the Great Detective is completely unaware of the vile creature who is blackmailing several noble families. This is a challenge for his racing engine of a brain.

Interestingly, however, the two outstanding scenes in the show which ripple with excitement—Milverton's visit to Baker Street where Holmes has to physically restrain Watson from attacking the blackguard, and the blackmailer's death at the hand of the veiled lady—are pure, unadulterated Conan Doyle.

In his research for the script, Jeremy Paul learned that at the same time the story was written there was in London society an ambivalent character, a friend of Ruskin, Whistler, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and other artists. His name was Charles Augustus Howell, and there were many who

believed him to be a blackmailer. It is most probable that Arthur Conan Doyle knew of him, and it is not pressing supposition too far to believe that he based his Charles Augustus on Howell. Jeremy Paul certainly followed this line of reasoning, which is why he presented Milverton as an art dealer—an ideal occupation which allowed him to move with ease in high society, gaining access to the secrets of the wealthy and vulnerable.

Paul let us know some new, if incidental, quirks about the Baker Street lodgers. 'I can't stand the smell of cabbage,' rants Holmes as he orders Mrs Hudson to take a plate of the offending vegetable away. On being handed a book of poetry, Watson smiles and observes, 'I do rather like Tennyson.' Throughout the whole film the Holmes and Watson relationship is nicely balanced, often by touches that the two men bring to their roles. Of this particular venture Brett said, 'If it was not in the script, I tried to put it there.' A case in point is when a frustrated Watson moans, 'There must be some way to fight this devil.' Holmes gives a curt nod and then places a hand of solace on his friend's shoulder. Similarly, there is that fleeting beam of pleasure on Holmes's face when he observes Watson enjoying the dancing at the Earl of Dovercourt's ball.

Holmes and Watson act as a team, both in the burglary of Milverton's house and when the blackmailer visits the Baker Street rooms. It is perhaps the last time in the series that there is such a strong sense that these two men live together, work together, and actually like each other. With the help of Jeremy Paul's dialogue, Hardwicke's Watson emerges not only as an intelligent, reliable, and sophisticated companion, but a perceptive one too. Particularly telling is his description of Milverton 'as a boy, brought up in lonely isolation, starved of parental affection...' No wonder Holmes blanches at this, for it seems that Watson has unwittingly described Holmes's own childhood.

Robert Hardy as Milverton steals the show. He portrays Milverton exactly as Conan Doyle described him: '. . . a round, plump, hairless face, a perpetual frozen smile and two keen grey eyes, which gleamed brightly from behind broad, golden-rimmed glasses.' For the first part of the drama, he remains a vague figure casting a shadow over the lives of his victims: we hear his smooth, oily voice, we catch a back view of him, but it is only when Watson encounters him in an art gallery that we first see this smiling damned villain face-on. It is a chilling sight.

As an experiment in doubling the length of a Sherlock Holmes episode, *The Master Blackmailer* was a success. However, there are several weaknesses. For example, if Milverton is as evil, powerful, and destructive as we are led to believe, and has been plying his foul trade for at least twelve years, surely Sherlock Holmes would know of him, just as he knew of Moriarty and his organisation. Similarly, the detective-as-plumber episode simply does not work. Here Holmes, disguised as a plumber, visits the Milverton household on the pretence of 'fixing the pipes'. His real intention is to learn the layout of the house and the habits of the inmates. He is aided and abetted in this by the young maid Aggie, who takes a shine to Sherlock in his guise as 'Escott the plumber'. I use the word disguise lightly: all it amounted to was Brett with uncombed hair, a vacant demeanour, and a strange country accent. Surely Holmes, even in disguise, would not have been able to prowl around the Milverton household as freely as he seems to do; and can one believe that Paul penned Escott's line, 'We plumb the depths—that's our firm's motto', or was it Jeremy Brett in a whimsical mood on the day of shooting?

The Aggie and Escott 'romance' is most interesting. In the original story it is dealt with briefly. Holmes discusses the episode with Watson:

'You will be interested to hear that I am engaged.'

'My dear fellow! I congrat——'

'To Milverton's housemaid.'

'Good heavens, Holmes!'

'I wanted information, Watson.'

'Surely you have gone too far?'

'It was a most necessary step. I am a plumber with a rising business, Escott by name. I have walked out with her each evening, and I have talked with her. Good heavens, those talks!'

To become engaged, even in the decorous Victorian days, one had to go further than simply talking. Holding hands and kissing must have been part of the process. It is difficult to imagine Holmes in any kind of amorous situation. Conan Doyle wisely presented the situation as a *fait accompli* and passed over it in less than a page. Unwisely, Granada dealt with it in some detail. It is true that Aggie, charmingly played by Sophie Thompson, did all the running, but Holmes was obliged to respond to her hugs and sighs. The shy Escott confesses that he does not know how to kiss, and no doubt we are meant to believe that this is also Holmes's real predicament. It is left to

Aggie to show him how. Once the kiss is over we see Escott emotionally overcome—or is it Holmes? The whole thing does not work. Jeremy Brett thought so too, afterwards:

'We should have left all that to the viewers' imagination. The kiss business was a mistake. Holmes was inexperienced with women, but he wasn't inexperienced as a detective and he shouldn't have reacted in the way I did. I wish that scene wasn't in the film.'

At the time of filming, Brett made this observation:

'Ah, yes, the kiss. If I say it's bending the willow in terms of what Arthur Conan Doyle originally intended, then I only hope it doesn't actually break it.'

Of course, for the press, Holmes's kiss was the only thing of interest about the film. The report in the *Sun* newspaper for 20 December 1991 is hilarious. Headed 'Sherlock shows he's no Holmo!', it reads:

Sherlock Holmes is to be seen in a sexy clinch for the first time.

The strait-laced sleuth romps with a busty serving maid in a £1 million TV special being screened by ITV in the New Year.

The plot of the new two-hour drama, *The Master Blackmailer*, also involves gays and transvestites.

In the episode Holmes, played by Jeremy Brett, pretends to be a randy plumber to get into the blackmailer's house. But he is cornered by a serving wench Agatha and ends up on his back kissing her—to the relief of fans who have wondered about his bachelor life-style.

Jeremy, 58, said yesterday: 'I was worried about the kissing scene. I took toothpaste and mouthwash on the set. I was concerned about the scene. I thought we might be infringing on Sherlock's sexuality, given that he is such a private man.'

There are other less-than-satisfying elements in the film, such as Holmes's brusque and cavalier manner with Mrs Hudson, dismissing her as though she were an errant chambermaid. The saving grace in these scenes is the smile that lights the landlady's face, as though to indicate that she knows Holmes really doesn't mean it and that his apparent rudeness is part of a game he plays with her.

Some Sherlockian viewers complained of lost moments from the story, particularly the scene near the end in which Lestrade arrives at Baker Street to enlist Holmes's assistance in tracking down the two intruders whom he believes murdered Milverton. In response to Lestrade's description of one of the fugitives, Holmes observes, 'Why, it might be a description of Watson.' The scene was scripted and filmed, but was cut from the final print. Both

Jeremy Paul and director Peter Hammond thought that the sly humour inherent in the scene tended to trivialise the strong drama that preceded it and reduced the power of the Milverton death scene.

The closing episode, featuring the auction of Milverton's *objet d'art*, is based on what happened when Charles Augustus Howell's goods and chattels were sold off. A whole array of noble names sent minions to bid for certain pieces in the hope of snapping up items which might conceal evidence of their indiscretions. Thus when Holmes sees Bertrand (Nickolas Grace), supplier of secrets and, in essence, Milverton's successor, bidding for the bust of Athene, the detective suspects that it contains evidence of some indiscretion. Back at Baker Street he smashes the bust, only to discover that he is wrong; but as he gazes at the shattered fragments in the grate, he glimpses a burning ember lighting the eye of the goddess. It glows brightly for a brief moment, the symbol of blackmail, the parasitic force which still lives, still survives, despite the death of one of its most powerful agents, the most dangerous man in London, Charles Augustus Milverton.

The press, by now a little bored with Sherlock Holmes films, and needing to nit pick, was in the main only grudgingly complimentary, although Susan Young's comment in the *Daily Express* summed up what a lot of us were thinking when she wrote, 'That is not to say it didn't pass a fairly enjoyable two hours, but there was definitely a feeling of things being stretched.' Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* was more generous:

The film itself is a gorgeous business. Thickly buttered, not to say jammed with mist and mirrors, greenery and tapestry, reflections of reflections. And a group of girls like a Fragonard on the grass. The Master Blackmailer, Charles Augustus Milverton lives in Hampstead in premises of unparalleled grandeur, with his own rain forest which suggests that his business is encouragingly brisk. As Sherlock Holmes remarked there are hundreds in this great city who turn white at his name.

Jeremy Paul who expanded the story, Chris Truelove who designed it, and Peter Hammond, who directed it, beautifully conceal the fact that there is no story there at all. *The Master Blackmailer* is melodrama with knobs on. The sum total of Holmes's contribution is to become engaged to Milverton's housemaid and burgle the Milverton house to very little purpose. While Holmes and Watson are shut in a cupboard, Milverton is dispatched by the Miss Otis of her day, who shoots him six times, crying ringingly 'Vile creature, I will free the world of a poisonous thing.' Robert Hardy succumbs at some length to some poisonous writhing.

There was little actual press comment about Jeremy Brett's performance as Holmes (or indeed Edward Hardwicke's as Watson).

Probably it had all been said before—the series had been running for eight years, after all. But this sense of omission was indicative of how Jeremy Brett's performance as Holmes was now being marginalised by the critics. To be fair, they left him alone and had digs at the thin plot, the over-indulgent camera work and the lack of actual detective work required to set matters straight; but to be ignored in this way is as damning as an out-and-out critical attack. The truth is that Jeremy Brett's portrayal of Sherlock Holmes, beloved by the fans, has never been accorded the appropriate accolades it deserved. As we move towards Jeremy's final performances, this is a subject I shall touch on again.

Ten

Feature-Length follies

IT WAS 1992, AND THINGS had changed a great deal at Granada. The money men were in. Michael Cox had left. David Plowright, chairman of Granada, who had given Michael the go-ahead to film the Holmes series in the first place, had been given the sack. This upset Jeremy greatly: 'Without David Plowright at the helm, the quality and standard of production at Granada will sink. To lose him is a fundamental mistake.' It was reported that Plowright was sacked on the recommendation of Granada's new chief executive, Gerry Robinson, and it has been suggested that they fell out over whether Granada should continue to be involved in film production. Robinson was seen as a money man whose mission was to cut costs.

The writing was clearly on the wall. Apart from the politics of the situation, there were other problems. The vintage wine of the Sherlock Holmes canon had already been consumed, leaving only the dregs, and Jeremy was suffering with his health. To make matters worse, June Wyndham Davies, who wanted to film some more Sherlocks, could not get a straight reply from the scheduling people in London. In many ways it was an ideal time for Jeremy to lay his baton down in readiness for a successor, whom he called 'the likely lad of the next generation'. But in spite of these odds, the Sherlock machine trundled on with diminishing returns. Certainly all the films that followed *The Master Blackmailer* are shadows of what went before.

Early in January, June Wyndham Davies got the call. Two more two-hour Sherlocks were wanted, and the idea was that one of them would be a Christmas special. This was a surprise for the Granada team. They already had three one-hour scripts in the pipeline—'The Retired Colourman', 'The Golden Pince-Nez' and 'The Red Circle'—but nothing resembling a feature length script. Reliable Jeremy Paul was contacted. He grinned at the memory of the phone call from June Wyndham Davies:

'I was asked to write a two-hour special in three weeks! They left the choice to me. Eventually I agreed and chose "The Sussex Vampire" and became absolutely

consumed by the project. I did it with two days to spare.'

However, unlike 'Charles Augustus Milverton', there is much less to develop and extend here—far fewer strands to tease out and re-weave into a new whole. In essence the final script contains only elements from Conan Doyle's story and the end result is virtually pastiche. With growing insecurity, Jeremy Brett knew only too well that they were moving into uncharted territory. He called it 'pretend Doyle', a concept he would not have countenanced two years earlier. Even Craig Dickson, script editor on the series, admitted to me that with the 'Vampire' production they had moved further from the base line than ever before.

With his script, Paul put the 'Gothic' back into Holmes. The dark mood that was so needed and desperately lacking in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* permeates the whole of this drama. At the centre of the story is a newly created character, Stockton, played by Roy Marsden (Adam Dalgleish of the televised P. D. James stories). Stockton manages to convince the villagers, the viewers, and to some extent Holmes himself, that he is a vampire—of a kind. Paul explained:

'There are, we know, some people who soak up the energy of others, like a sponge, and draw out their resources and pocket them. Moriarty, for example, has a sort of vampirism about him.'

But the power Stockton wields is only part of the tangle Holmes is set to unravel. From the original story, we still encounter the strange crippled lad, Jacky (Richard Dempsey); his father Bob Ferguson (Keith Barron); and the injured baby, who is very quickly despatched. However, Jeremy Paul places the Ferguson household at the centre of a web of intrigue in the village of Lamberley, and the threat of bloodsucking now encompasses the whole of the community. It is a strange and compelling script, but it is not Sherlock Holmes.

During the location shooting on 'Vampire' I joined the crew, which was filming in the charming little village of Stanton in the Cotswolds. This was chosen to represent the Sussex by water of Lamberley. However, the village is so clearly situated in the Cotswolds—the lie of the land, the architecture, and the russet stonework are so typical of that area—that to call the film *The Sussex Vampire* would have been an obvious misnomer. It was suggested that it be re-named *The Lamberley Vampire* but, with Lamberley

sounding like an adjective describing an affliction rather than a location, that was also rejected. June Wyndham Davies at one time considered *The Cotswold Vampire*, which I told her was equally silly. The title that emerged finally was *Sherlock Holmes and The Last Vampyre*.

On that hot day in Stanton in May 1992 I was shocked to see how big Jeremy had become. At the time I was unaware that he was bloated by wrongly prescribed drugs; I simply knew he was bloated. He also seemed to find difficulty moving with ease in the heat, weighed down as he was with his great black coat. Out in the sun he had an umbrella to keep him in shadow, and a prop girl held a portable fan to his face to prevent his make-up melting.

He invited me into the comparative cool of his caravan for a chat. He sat back, sweating profusely and smoking continuously as we talked. Despite the bright eyes and the winning smile, I could tell he was not a happy man and that his mind was somewhat distracted.

'I'm out of my depth. You see I can't do my usual trick of bringing Doyle to the rehearsal. You see I only receive a script just before we start a show, and the first week of rehearsals has always been my week for slavishly returning the script to Doyle, omitting any real departures from the canon. Now I'm not able to do that. If I make a criticism, I'm criticising the adaptor, not Doyle. Basically, it's not the canon anymore; we're only doing bits.'

He then went on to express his concerns on other counts, suggesting that the new, young directors tended not to be interested in the Baker Street scenes because they provided less scope for them to be innovative:

'We've only had two days in the Baker Street sitting-room in this one. Now I know, for example, in "The Musgrave Ritual" we didn't go into Holmes's sitting room at all, but basically it is the platform to all the stories and I would hate to lose that.'

He was sad that there was no Mrs Hudson in the vampire tale. He always loved having Rosalie Williams on the set; he was very fond of her:

'She is the only female I relate to as Holmes on a regular basis.

'Deduction is also what we're beginning to miss. I really am short on detective work. Too much of this case relies on intuition. That is there in Doyle, of course—Holmes is able to make the most wonderful subliminal leaps—but there must also be deduction.'

I expressed my surprise that he did not have more power and influence both in the writing process and on the set. He shrugged wearily:

'I am only an actor, my dear. I always tell the director that he should think of me as brand new: I want all the fresh input I can get.'

This, then, was a weary Brett, far removed from the fellow who would have stand-up rows with writers, directors, and even Michael Cox if he thought the product was moving too far away from Conan Doyle. Because of his illness, his energy levels could not afford him that fighting spirit any more; but he knew in his heart that the willow was being bent to the extreme of its endurance.

The reviews for *Sherlock Holmes and The Last Vampyre* were the worst the series had received to date. Peter Paterson in the *Daily MM* headed his piece, 'Bewildering, my dear Holmes', and complained that not only was the plot difficult to unravel, but also a 'certain confusion was apparent from the physical similarity between Jeremy Brett and Roy Marsden, either or both of whom could pass as Count Dracula. Putting Holmes in traditional tweeds instead of funereal black might have helped but frankly I found the story utterly confusing and have to admit that I failed to understand the ending at all.'

I asked Jeremy at a later date why he had worn those 'funereal' town clothes in the country.

'I wore black to try and disguise my weight. I would have worn a lighter coat and possibly a deerstalker but I had to stay in black to hide my fatness. I was like a great big Buddha. I cannot bear to watch myself waddle down the station platform in *Vampyre*.'

Jeremy's size was a point picked up by David Thomas writing in the *Sunday Express*: 'Holmes and Watson investigate the *Last Vampyre* in a lavish production whose most frightening aspect was the enormous amount of weight which had settled about Jeremy Brett's once emaciated frame.'

Max Davidson in *The Daily Telegraph* gave a very thoughtful consideration of the piece, praising Brett (a fairly rare occurrence at the time) but condemning the adaptation:

Jeremy Brett's Holmes is quite as fine a creation in its way as John Thaw's Morse. It is a hypnotic performance, mannered in the best sense and veering excitingly between introspection and extroversion. The classic Basil Rathbone-Nigel Bruce pairing played off Holmes's superhuman intelligence against Watson's stupidity; here Edward Hardwicke's Watson is not stupid, merely placid, while Brett's Holmes bristles not simply with intelligence, but with a strange psychic energy that transfigures his whole being.

But it is one thing to have 24 carat stars, another to use them properly. The BBC's 1960 Holmes condensed the original stories into half-hour episodes¹⁵, too short to do them justice. Granada have extended them to an hour, though this has necessitated a degree of padding. Stretching them to two hours—as in last night's *The Last Vampyre* — is sheer madness. To spin it out meant writing in a part for Roy Marsden, a part for Maurice Denham and a part for Elizabeth Spriggs. Add a chorus of villagers straight out of grand opera and what you got was a windy piece of Victorian Gothic which respected neither the letter nor the spirit of Conan Doyle's original. Holmes's world is, above all, a rational one. To make the great detective grapple with characters invested with a mysterious evil which defied rational explanation was a nonsense.

Jeremy Brett summed it up more concisely: 'Basically, it's not the canon anymore.' This review and those like them hurt him very much. Although he still managed to pick up pleasing personal reviews, the product that he was so proud of, his Sherlock Show, was being degraded and rubbished where once it had been praised.

In July 1992, Independent Television ran a forty-eight hour Telethon, a marathon extravaganza designed to raise money for charity. Included as part of the entertainment was a crime mystery for viewers to solve. This mystery was shown in four segments over the forty-eight hours, and each episode featured a detective from an Independent Television production. There was Scottish detective Taggart (Mark McManus), Dutch sleuth Van der Valk (Barry Foster), the English Inspector Wexford (George Baker), and good old Sherlock Holmes, who appeared in the first part of *The Four Oaks Mystery*. I cannot begin to unravel the complications of the whole puzzle, but the Holmes section was fascinating and featured Brett and Hardwicke, along with veteran actress Phyllis Calvert as Holmes's imperious godmother, Lady Cordelia. (I never knew that Holmes was so well connected.)

The sequence was filmed in the usual rich Granada style. It was made during the filming of *The Last Vampyre*, and shares with that film the backdrop of Adlington Hall, a stately home much used by Granada in the Holmes series. To my knowledge, this purely pastiche sequence has never

been shown outside England, and it has therefore become something of a collector's item.

Holmes and Watson are on a fishing holiday, staying with Lady Cordelia at Great Tunlow Hall, when they are called in to solve a double murder. The solution to the problem lies buried in the past and involves a treasure consisting of Roman jewels. Holmes is intrigued by the reference made by one of the dying victims to 'four oaks', but before he is able to make real headway in the case he is called away on another matter: one, Watson informs us, which would lead to a fatal appointment above a waterfall in Switzerland. The enigma is left for the next three detectives to unravel in turn.

In a sense there was more fidelity in the playing, and certainly in the script, of this little episode than there was in the next full-blown Sherlock. If Brett was concerned about the lack of deduction and the reliance on intuition in the *The Last Vampyre*, he must have been beside himself with worry when he read the script for the next film. Based on another slender tale, 'The Noble Bachelor', this screenplay was written by Trevor Bowen. It was renamed *The Eligible Bachelor*, probably to distance itself from the original, which it barely resembled. This farrago had Holmes involved in prophetic dreams and a nervous breakdown. 'I did cut a lot of stuff out before we started filming,' Jeremy told me, 'but there was still too much in that was not satisfactory.'¹

The timbers of the original story are still discernible but, in viewing it, I was reminded of Holmes's observation in 'The Empty House': 'There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity.' The main ingredient added to the recipe by Bowen is Holmes's dreams, nightmares filled with weird images of torn chairs, a strange creature reaching towards him through a mass of cobwebs, and flashes of the climactic tumble over the Reichenbach Falls with Professor Moriarty. The dreams disturb and unbalance the detective, his perturbation stemming from his inability to apply rationality to the hallucinatory experiences. As an actor, Jeremy Brett warmed to the challenge of exploring and presenting new aspects of his *alter ego*:

'It is a departure. We are moving into a space we have never been in before. We now have Holmes picturing the future when he's actually on a case. It becomes really

gripping. I don't know what Doyleans will think of it, but it is so very exciting.'

A more rational Brett would have been in no doubt what Doyleans and Sherlockians would think about this infelicitous nonsense, but during the filming of *Bachelor* he was on a high about Holmes, finding the character and its potential fascinating. We talked on the set of *Bachelor* in October 1992, and in the short time since the *Vampyre* shoot I could see a distinct change in him. He was more buoyant and eager to talk, but at times there were wild and whirling words. He was on a roller coaster ride with Holmes again. I remembered hearing him state on radio three years previously that after finishing *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes* he would be finished with Holmes for good. Now here he was, bright-eyed, up and running with the fellow again, talking with great enthusiasm about exploring the myriad features of the character. He was on a Holmes trip. At one point in our conversation he announced that he was very keen to get another Holmes play off the ground:

'I had a germ of an idea, literally two weeks ago. First of all, I want to show the brilliance of Holmes, so I envisage, at the opening, a 25-minute monologue, at speed, recalling fifteen cases: a sort of *tour de force* of the brilliance of his brain. This is just to show the speed of him. It's like a talking mouth; an internal mantra. Then when he finishes, he turns, observes his friend at the table and says, "Ah, Watson, breakfast!"'

This seemed to me at the time a fascinating idea, but Brett did not seem to notice that it would be rather demeaning for Watson—whoever played him—to sit still and quiet for twenty-five minutes every night while his fellow actor ran off a *tour de force*. I also wondered where the play would go from there.

'Tibet! It's to do with what happened when he got there—how he emptied his brain and purified his system with water, the simplest foods, the purest air and the torment he went through trying to do it.'

Surely, then, I suggested, you really do not need a Watson in this play.

'Oh, yes, Watson you see has been to Vienna—studied psychoanalysis — and takes on the role of counsellor during this investigation of the inner workings of Sherlock Holmes.'

It was quite clear to me that while Jeremy was talking about this project, he was verbalising ideas as they came to him. This became even

clearer when he described his concept of the play's ending:

'Holmes says to Watson, "Come on, old friend, we have to be at Victoria Station soon." I hold up two tickets. "Where are we going, Holmes?" "To Afghanistan, my dear friend."

This was a wonderful mish-mash of ideas, but not a coherent thread on which to base a play. In any case I harboured serious doubts whether the theatre-going public wanted to see another play analysing the complex nature of the world's greatest detective. If Jeremy Brett had been ready to take to the stage again as Sherlock Holmes, I believe audiences would have wanted a complex mystery drama containing clues, detection, suspense, and a nasty villain. However, he assured me that he was working on this new play with Jeremy Paul. He was feeding Paul with ideas and the writer was constructing a drama out of them.

I later rang Jeremy Paul to find out more. He confirmed that Brett was feeding ideas 'daily'. Paul told me: 'I listen to Jeremy and make notes. I don't want to discourage him but nothing will come of it.'

Nothing did come of it. Jeremy's enthusiasm for the play dwindled as his high lost altitude.

Another indication that Jeremy was not fully himself around the time of the filming of *The Eligible Bachelor* was his enthusiasm for the notorious nightie scene. When we talked, he was due to film this scene the next day. The basic premise of the sequence is that the dream-haunted Holmes spies from his Baker Street window a clue lying in the gutter outside. Without stopping to get dressed, he rushes out into the street and the pouring rain in his nightshirt, scoops up the clue and sits on the pavement to examine it. The idea is not only demeaning to the character, it really has no dramatic credence or value; yet as Brett talked about shooting the scene the following day he was as delighted as a child in an adventure playground: 'I am really looking forward to this shoot. We're going have lots of water and I am going to get very wet. It's going to be great fun.'

When he spoke of that scene again in the last year of his life, his opinion had changed greatly. He groaned:

'Oh, the nightie scene. It's an abomination. I wish I had never done it. When I saw it, I put my head in my hands in horror. It is so wrong.'

There was a lot that was 'so wrong' about *The Eligible Bachelor*. Despite being lushly photographed, the plot was twisted and extended in such a grotesque manner that it had an air of overblown grand opera about it. Granada had lost sight of what Sherlock Holmes was all about. The press certainly thought so, too. While praising the production values, they were unhappy about the film as a Holmes vehicle. Compton Miller in *The Daily Express* summed up the general impression: 'Despite coaxing from taciturn Dr Watson and prim Mrs Hudson, Holmes's interest in detective work seemed to have terminally waned.' The Sherlockian enthusiasts were more brutal. Pamela Bruxner, writing in *The Sherlock Holmes journal* (Summer 1993), admitted:

... it has to be said at once that attempts at critical detachment are doomed to founder beneath such a farrago of nonsense. . . . The new plot is well-nigh impossible to follow . . . whilst I can imagine [a] hypothetical 21st century audience deriving some pleasure from *The Last Vampyre*, let them beware of *The Eligible Bachelor*: they may actually die laughing.

Who was to blame for this sorry state of affairs? Well, rather like the killing in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, everyone had a hand in it, everyone was responsible: the schedulers and the Granada money men for demanding the two-hour follies when the material wasn't there for them; the writers who wandered too far away from the original concept of a Sherlock Holmes story; the producer for being too concerned with glossy motion picture appearance and neglecting the basics; the directors for not trimming the excesses; and the actors for not digging in their heels and saying, 'This is not right!' Of course, it is easy for me to say all this. It must be remembered that each cog in this messy wheel had a living to earn and that pressure must have played some part in controlling their actions. Jeremy Brett was not physically and, more importantly, mentally well and, while he thought he was adding new dimensions to his interpretation of Holmes, he was in fact destroying some of his credibility and fidelity. He was hurt by the reviews and by the critical comments that Dame Jean Conan Doyle made to him privately, partly because he knew they were right.

Eleven

The Memoirs :JB's Last Bow

THE FINAL SERIES of Sherlock Holmes films, *The Memoirs*, almost weren't made, and perhaps it would have been better if it had not been. While there are one or two appealing things about the six films in *The Memoirs*, Jeremy Brett looks and sounds so painfully ill in these episodes that they are distressing to watch. One could be forgiven for thinking that the actor who appeared in 'A Scandal in Bohemia' had left the series, to be replaced by his much older, much fatter invalid brother.

June Wyndham Davies was still in charge of the Sherlock project as 1994 dawned. And, as far as she was aware, the programme schedulers required another two feature-length Holmes films by the end of the year. This time she was determined not to stretch and manipulate a meagre Conan Doyle tale into a hundred-minute screenplay; instead she would go for a straight pastiche. At least with this approach the critics could not complain about what had been done to a Conan Doyle text. It was at this point that I became involved, albeit briefly, in the Granada plans. June had read my Holmes novel *The Tangled Skein*, a pastiche which pits Sherlock Holmes against Count Dracula. She enjoyed the book and thought the characterisations were accurate and true to the spirit of Conan Doyle, but she said 'we've done the vampire bit; have you anything else?' I explained I was about half-way through writing a third novel, *Sherlock Holmes and the Book of the Dead*, in which Holmes investigates the theft of Egyptian artefacts from the British Museum—a case which eventually leads him to Egypt.

June expressed an interest in the project and asked me to send her a copy of the completed section of the novel and a detailed synopsis of the rest. I did so, and received another call from her a few days later: she liked what she had read very much but there was a snag. No way would the Granada budget run to sending Sherlock to Egypt, and they couldn't mock it up in the studios convincingly. (I was reminded fleetingly of Michael Cox's problem with the Australian outback in 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery'.) Could I, she asked, rework the final stages of the plot so that all the action

takes place in Britain? It was a tall order, but I was prepared to try anything if it meant that a Sherlock Holmes story of mine would be dramatised and filmed, and star Jeremy Brett.

I worked over the weekend cudgelling my brains and wrestling with the plot so that I could arrive at a conclusion which satisfied me, while at the same time meeting the requirements of the Granada budget. By Monday morning I had something, which I sent off to June Wyndham Davies. I did not have to wait long. On the following Thursday, June rang me. 'We're going ahead with it, David. I think you've done a marvellous job on changing it and it works beautifully. I've spoken with Sally Head and we're going to make *The Book of the Dead* with Jeremy.'

After putting the phone down, I could hardly speak. It took about five minutes for the sense of wonder and delight to release me from my numb and dumb state. My euphoria was to be short-lived, however. Within the next fortnight two things happened to bring about the demise of my *Book of the Dead* project. First of all, the schedulers informed June Wyndham Davies that they didn't want any more two-hour Sherlocks. It was possible, they said, that they could use a few one-hour shows. This was a blow to June, who could see the Granada Holmes about to slip away. She fought like mad to secure timings for six one-hour Sherlocks, but she met indifference and reticence from the powers that be all along the way. As fate would have it, a 'window in the schedule' appeared for January 1994, and the Sherlock Holmes series could have the six week slot. June grasped the nettle, despite the fact that she had only six months to produce a series of half-a-dozen one-hour films. A daunting prospect indeed.

Consideration was given as to whether my *Book of the Dead* could be reduced to an hour. I thought not. The complexity of the plot would not allow for such a truncation without spoiling the story. I suggested a two-part presentation, but June said this idea would receive the thumbs down from the planners. (This despite the fact that shortly afterwards another Granada product, *Cracker*, regularly went into two-and three-part presentation.)

What finally killed off my project was Jeremy Brett himself. Still somewhat bruised by the poor reception to *The Last Vampyre* and *The Eligible Bachelor*, and perhaps not a little dismayed that he had allowed himself to be a part of such farragos, he dug in his heels. If he was going to do Holmes again, it must be Conan Doyle's Holmes only, and all extraneous

infidelities must be expunged. Pastiche was out! He now regarded the one-hour slot for the films as the ideal time span for a Conan Doyle tale: 'It can capture the rhythm of the story and there's no need for padding!'

I could not blame Jeremy for wishing to stick with Arthur Conan Doyle. That is the way it should be. The sad irony was that I felt that my tale was far more in keeping with the Doylean spirit of Sherlock Holmes than either *Vampyre* or *Bachelor*.

At Granada, June was dusting off a few one-hour scripts which had never been filmed, and contacting tried and tested stalwart writers to see what they could come up with from the remaining stories. Script editor Craig Dickson told me in 1992 that they had already filmed all that was worth filming; but he had moved on, and Elizabeth Bradley was brought in. She was a delightful lady but her knowledge of Sherlock Holmes was weak, and the dictate from the top, regarding the scripts, was 'cut out the talk and concentrate on the visuals'—a statement which effectively illustrates how far Granada had moved from the bench-mark set up by Michael Cox.

The series got off to a bad start. Edward Hardwicke had gone off to appear in the film *Shadowlands* with Anthony Hopkins and was not available for the first episode to be filmed, 'The Golden Pince-Nez', so Charles Gray as Mycroft was wheeled in to play the sidekick role. The script had to be tampered with to allow and explain this change. Those who know their canon know that Mycroft, rather like Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe, would never leave his chair to see if the milk had been delivered, let alone travel to Yoxley Place with his irritating brother to investigate a trivial murder. But here we are dealing with mass-market television; it moves mountains—and Mycroft was the mountain it moved.

Visually, 'The Golden Pince-Nez' is stunning. The flashback scenes of the Russian Revolution belie the fact that only seventeen extras and two horses were used. The script by Gary Hopkins is fairly faithful, excluding the Watson/Mycroft switch, but the whole thing seems to lack pace and suspense.

The second *Memoir* to be filmed was 'The Red Circle'. In essence this was the only show in the series where everything went normally and comparatively smoothly. Both Brett and Hardwicke were in attendance; Jeremy was in reasonable health; and there were no major hold-ups in

production. Little did anyone know that it would be the last time this would be achieved.

'The Red Circle' was one of Jeremy's favourites from this final series. It features the main elements from the original, with added Italian gusto from the pen of Jeremy Paul. The script had actually been written some years before and put on the shelf. Dust was blown off it and rewrites ordered. Although the end result betrays evidence of the tampering, the story-telling is tight and we are conscious that here is a real detective tale with a puzzle to challenge the deductive powers of Holmes.

There are obvious Paul touches throughout, especially those with which he builds up Watson's role and character, giving him some detective work to do. When Holmes is shown the note written by Mrs Warren's mysterious lodger, he flings it across to Watson with a quizzical grunt. Watson scrutinises the note and responds, 'The pencil is broad-tipped and violet-tinted and used with considerable pressure. The paper has been torn off at the side'—words which are spoken by Holmes in the original tale. The script also reveals a sentimental side to the sleuth. Holmes has great respect for Firmani, a Paul-created character, who according to Holmes is 'a point of refuge for the Italian community in London, a beacon of light, if you will. . . .' When he is murdered by the revenging villain Black Gorgiano, Holmes is visibly moved and quotes from *Cymbeline*:

'Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney sweepers, come to dust.'

The final shot of 'The Red Circle' underlines Holmes's emotion, showing him with tears in his eyes while watching the opera in the very theatre where Firmani was butchered. It was a shot that was put in later. Patrick Gowers telephoned Brett after seeing the rough-cut of the film and said that in the final scene, where Holmes and Watson are in a box at the opera, it appears that the detective, eyes closed, seemed to be enjoying the music rather than remembering 'his friend Firmani'. Brett took his point and persuaded June Wyndham Davies to insert the crying shot.

Although 'The Golden Pince-Nez' was the first of the series to be filmed, the third show on the shooting schedule, 'The Three Gables', was the first to be shown both in Britain and, much later, the United States. It was the most sumptuous and glossy of the series, due in no small measure

to Peter Hammond's flashy direction. Unfortunately, while we can appreciate Hammond's talent and technique—his use of images is stunning, and his trademark is using mirrors and other reflective surfaces in diverse ways—he paid too little attention to the mechanics of the plot and to the performances, allowing some players to overact dreadfully, particularly Gary Cady as the doomed Douglas Maberley, whose death scene seemed to have been yanked from a risible Italian opera.

I went on location to observe some of the shooting of 'The Three Gables' on a glorious day in early September 1993. I motored out to Lyme Park near Manchester, a location used in several of the previous episodes. It is a beautiful stretch of undulating parkland, at the heart of which is Lyme Hall. A sprawling building, the main section of which was constructed in the eighteenth century, it features eighteenth and nineteenth century interiors, and is an ideal backdrop for a Sherlock Holmes film. It is always strange and paradoxical to see these graceful buildings running wild with electrical cables, lights, control vans, and similar accoutrements of a modern television production team, along with actors in elegant Victorian garb mixing with the tracksuited, trained crew in garish anoraks. It is a surreal vision of the ancient and modern.

I witnessed the filming of the opening scene: a ball at the fashionable town house of Isadora Klein (Claudine Auger). It was a complicated and exciting scene, requiring much dextrous handling from Peter Hammond and his assistant director, Ian Galley. There were the principals, including Peter Wyngarde as Langdale Pike, to deal with; there were dancers and extras to arrange, group and direct; and there were mirrors to polish!

Towards the end of shooting, a large benevolent figure appeared behind the cameras, dressed in familiar white trousers and black sweater: Jeremy Brett in mufti. He greeted many of the crew members by name, distributed several kisses to the ladies, and had a brief exchange with numerous technicians. He greeted me like a long lost friend and agreed to chat with me in his caravan after lunch.

Jeremy was still in his own clothes when I went to see him later, but now his face was chalk-white with make-up. 'Sue Milton's¹⁶ been at me,' he grinned, beckoning me to take a seat. He leaned back and lit the first of the numerous cigarettes he consumed during our talk. I thought he looked

unwell; he was wheezing and short of breath and still very fat. Here is a man very out of condition, I thought. If only I had known the full extent of his illness.

At first, our conversation took on the air of a confessional:

'I know I told you that the two-hour format might be better, but of course, it's not. The ideal format for these stories is one hour. I was wrong.'

Apart from the criticism of *Vampyre* and *Bachelor*, what, I wondered, had brought about this *volte-face*?

'The tricky thing, technically, as an actor, is, if you're playing a man without a heart, it is very hard to sustain it realistically for two hours. People want to get underneath the shell, and this has led, on one or two occasions, to the loss of the mystique of Holmes. For example, for you to hear about Holmes having a love affair with a girl—"I'm engaged to be married"—is one thing, but to actually see it is something else. It exposes too much of the character. You see, I don't mind bending the willow, but I don't want it ever to break. In the one-hours you have a chance to see SH at his most brilliant without peeping too far behind the scenes.'

I asked if he accepted, then, that the last two features had strayed too far from the original. Brett's eyes widened into a mirthful stare and, with lips quivering, nodded gently in acquiescence.

'"'The Sussex Vampire"' is a terribly weak story to begin with, but to extend it to two hours prompted Jeremy Paul to introduce a new character which confused people. It was a vampire story without a vampire. There were some good things about *Bachelor* but there were some excesses which I hated, like falling in the puddle and all that rot.'

On that warm, sunny day, sitting white-laced in his caravan, Jeremy Brett claimed to be happier than he had been in years:

'... now we're back on track with the one-hours. The new stories are incredibly complicated and really need no padding. They've also given me new challenges. In "The Red Circle", which I filmed before this one, it is suggested by Watson in the first act that perhaps Holmes is acting in the matter purely in the sense of "art for art's sake", and that he is not fully committed, involved personally in the investigation. So I devised an incident toward the end to show this is not the case. I arranged that Black Gorgiano should put his bloodied hand on Holmes's face, so that it is smeared red. It is a symbolic action to show that Holmes is very much involved. It is a powerful moment.'

I got the impression there had been more than the usual tinkering with 'The Three Gables' story to make it fit the demands of a plush television film. Brett shrugged:

'Not really. But some bits had to go. Oh dear, I blush for Doyle with the Steve Dixie passage in the story—it's so rude—racist. I am a little bit worried about the logistics of the script later on. Watson is looking after the old lady, Mrs Maberley, in her house and he's roughed up. He's nearly killed. Why isn't Holmes there to protect him? I don't know. He should have been.'

This prompted me to raise the question about the Holmes and Watson relationship. I suggested that in the recent films, it appeared that the detective and his biographer had become two isolated souls who merely tolerate each other because they share rooms. Brett was surprised at this observation, but assured me that in general there was more interplay between the characters in the new series, particularly in 'The Three Gables':

'Watson is the heart; Holmes is the head. Watson is also keen on sleuthing, or he wouldn't be there. I think he likes Holmes, but I don't think he's over the moon about him.'

I begged to differ on this point, saying that Watson had great affection and even love for his detective friend. Jeremy grinned and called me 'an old softy'. However, he did add that he endeavoured to show that he cared for Watson, but not directly to his face.

'I invented a moment in "Gables", after Watson has been roughed up, when I'm about to confront Isadora Klein. I tell Watson to wait for me. I am about to leave and then I turn and point to his bandaged hand and say, "It's time that hand was re-dressed," and then I go. It's a touch, but I hope it says much. Now behind old Watson's back I say to Isadora, "You nearly brought about the death of *my friend*, John Watson.'"

It is nearly three years since Jeremy told me that, but it is a moment I will always remember. As he acted out the line about Watson, he leaned forward towards me, casting me momentarily into the rôle of Isadora. An accusing finger was stabbed in my direction, and his white face became alive with anger and the bright eyes flashed as he lived the line. I lived it too, and experienced the cliché of a tingle running up my spine. The line is in the film, but it is not spoken with as much force and passion as was demonstrated to me in Jeremy Brett's caravan.

Jeremy then went on to tell me about the scene he was to film that day:

'It's the climax of the film. Holmes is faced with the brilliant and beautiful Spanish woman. They clash, rather like Tito Gobbi and Maria Callas in the second act of *Tosca*. She rushes towards him to tear his eyes out and he grabs her arms to stop her. They are very close, eye to eye. I am not sure how I, as Holmes, am going to react.'

This is new territory for me. Holmes thinks it is easier to deal with a woman than a man, but he has forgotten the power of emotion in such an encounter. I have always to remember that sexually Holmes is a virgin.'

Sadly, this scene does not really work, partly because Brett was too ill to give it his all. He lacked sufficient breath to give the lines their full force and his movements were slow and cumbersome, like a man walking under water.

The following day he collapsed on the set and had to be rushed to hospital. The story given out at the time stated that he had stayed on too long to watch a night shoot and had caught a chill on his chest. In truth it was the drug lithium, which he was being prescribed, that was causing problems, and water was building up in his lungs. After a few days in hospital, he came out to finish 'The Three Gables'. He was in a wheelchair between takes and had the use of oxygen to ease his breathing. Once the film was completed he was hospitalised for more than a month.

For June Wyndham Davies it was nightmare time. Already behind schedule, one episode had had to be completed without Edward Hardwicke, one of the series' stars; and now her leading man was in hospital. The filming of the next episode, with the poignantly prophetic title 'The Dying Detective', had to be delayed—an expensive procedure.

Claiming he was fit and well again, Jeremy Brett began shooting 'The Dying Detective' in October. He was not fit and well; he was going through a private hell. In the following January, when he was able to see some light at the end of his particularly traumatic tunnel, he explained to me what had happened to him. First of all he showed me the press release which presented the 'public' story:

'In 1986 I had a breakdown due to the death of my wife Joanie from cancer. Recently (November 4th 1993) I was concerned that I was showing similar symptoms to those I had prior to my breakdown in 1986, and because of this, had myself admitted to Charters Nightingale Hospital.

'However, after a medical examination I was diagnosed as having heart failure and was later admitted to The Harley Street Clinic, where I was prescribed the drug Digoxin, Digitalis. I am now thrilled to be able to say that my health is Oh so much better.

'Because of my health problems over the last seven years I am hoping that I can be of some reassurance to those with mental and heart problems, and demonstrate in some way that life can still be joyful and full of hope.' 'Jeremy Brett.'

This was the calm, collected and sanitized version of what happened. The end-of-shooting party for 'The Dying Detective' was also aimed at celebrating Jeremy Brett's sixtieth birthday. During the course of it he became ill again, and suffered what he called 'a white out', when 'the world went pink'. The next day he was in Charters Nightingale Mental Hospital at Lisson Grove fighting for his life and sanity. The drugs which had brought about lithium poisoning, causing him to swell with water retention, had also seriously damaged his heart. In addition, there were fears of possible gangrene infection at one stage. The medics at Charters realised that Jeremy needed help for his heart condition; so, according to him, they

'brought a heart specialist over to attend on me, prescribing digitalis, but they wouldn't let me go. They zapped me with more drugs to make me malleable because doctors have to close ranks. Eventually I had to "act" my way out of the mental hospital: I pretended to take the pills and didn't. They wanted me to leave depressed and humiliated. So being an actor I managed to dip down to that level for their sake. However, the medication they had given me had re-affected my heart. So when I "escaped", I went to a Harley Street clinic for my heart, where I should have been advised to go from the beginning. This was just before Christmas. They took off about five litres of water from my body. My legs took five days to go down and then I began to feel very much better.'

Meanwhile, back in her office, June Wyndham Davies was tearing her hair out. The series she had pushed and fought for, a series that had only staggered to its feet, had now collapsed altogether. Her star, her Sherlock, was incapable of filming. What was she to do? It was a puzzle worthy of the Great Detective himself: how do you make a Sherlock Holmes film without Sherlock Holmes? What she did do was grit her teeth and find a way around her difficulties. Her difficulties were great and the way was not ideal, but she succeeded in keeping to schedule with the shooting of 'The Mazarin Stone'. Her solution was to bring in Charles Gray again, this time to take on the Sherlock part. Other guest actors in the show were disappointed that Brett was not there; according to Jeremy they had not been told anything until they turned up for rehearsal. Jeremy himself was sad not to be reunited with James Villiers, with whom he had been at preparatory school.

The script for 'The Mazarin Stone', by Gary Hopkins, also featured elements from another Conan Doyle Holmes story, 'The Three Garridebs'. It was a mess. Given a healthy Holmes and a script editor who could have cut

down the whimsy and generated a more realistic denouement, this might have worked—but it was not to be. It was another of Peter Hammond's reflection-obsessed vehicles. The great sadness connected with the 'Garridebs' plot concerns a lost opportunity—an opportunity to really show Holmes's concern and love for Watson. It would not have been a moment of pastiche either. It is there in the original. The villain fires two shots at Watson:

... I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. There was a crash as Holmes's pistol came down on the man's head. I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend's wiry arms were round me and he was leading me to a chair.

'You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you're not hurt!' It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask.

It would have made a wonderful moment for Hardwicke and Brett, and would have been far more convincing in its suggestion of Holmes's emotional nature than the contrived moments in 'The Red Circle'. Watson concludes by stating:

'... I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.'

Even before Jeremy Brett was invalided out of 'The Mazarin Stone', the script did not allow for such a scene.

The main story of 'The Mazarin Stone' is framed by two short scenes featuring Holmes. These were filmed later when the actor had recovered sufficiently to resume work. In the opening scene (which, according to Jeremy, he and Hammond scripted), Holmes tells Watson that he must be away to 'the high lands'. The idea was to inject a sense of mysticism into Holmes's absence, along with an implication that he was still tortured by the Reichenbach incident. Holmes returns at the climax of the story, when the corpulent Mycroft has retrieved the precious stone. 'Well done, brother mine,' intones a disembodied voice. We catch a glimpse of Sherlock enveloped in mist as though to indicate that he has been observing all the events from afar—up in the high land.

Brett returned to the series just before the turn of the year. He came to the read-through of 'The Cardboard Box' attended by a nurse. June

Wyndham Davies told me at the time that he had been instructed that he could only film on alternate days—a restriction that played havoc with the shooting schedule and deadlines. 'It's not as though he has a small part,' she observed pithily.

'The Cardboard Box' is perhaps the best production in this final series. I say this, not just because Jeremy was looking more like the Sherlock of yore, but because there were other sparkling features too. Trevor Bowen cleverly took the major elements from the original story and strengthened them, and in doing so deepened the mystery and heightened the tragedy. The opening is pleasing to see, especially as this was to be the last time Edward Hardwicke and Jeremy Brett appeared together as the legendary dwellers of Baker Street. We see the Great Detective and his Biographer seated by a blazing fire in their sitting room, each smoking a pipe, conversing like old friends about the recent spate of grave robberies. This domestic vignette is the concentrated essence of what is so enjoyable about the stories and the films. Edward Hardwicke unfailingly maintains the image of the ideal Watson in this scene, and Brett is almost back to his best with the impishness and arrogance that almost conceals the love and respect he has for his companion. There are pleasing interchanges between Mrs Hudson and her lodger, and one wishes that Colin Jeavons could have made it into this final outing as Lestrade, although Tom Chadbon is very good as the non-canonical Inspector Hawkins.

In this episode, Brett was reunited with Joanna David, who played his plain-Jane wife when he appeared as Maxim de Winter in the BBC production of *Rebecca*.

The original tale is set in 'blazing August', with Paget's illustrations featuring Holmes wearing a straw boater. Granada was stuck with filming in barren January. However, Bowen's screenplay cleverly turns this handicap to the story's advantage. The stark black-and-white snow-clad locales mirror the bleak elements of this domestic tragedy—this crime of passion. Conan Doyle himself considered this a very dark tale. Although it was originally part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series printed in the *Strand*, he asked for it to be withdrawn when the stories were collected in book form as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* in Britain in 1893. Perhaps he considered the elements of murder, mutilation, and adultery too

savage for the British reader at the time. The story finally re-emerged in the collection entitled *His Last Bow* in 1917.

Jeremy told me that he was very pleased with the final words he uttered in this film—the final words he uttered as Sherlock Holmes, in fact. They were a close paraphrase of Conan Doyle's own from the story. When the tragic lovers are discovered in the river, frozen beneath a sheet of ice, Holmes turns to his companion and says: 'What is the meaning of it, Watson? What is the object of this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must have a purpose, or else our universe has no purpose and that is unthinkable. But what? That is humanity's great problem to which reason so far has no answer.'

Shortly after completing 'The Cardboard Box', Jeremy Brett was back in hospital—a mental hospital. In his own self-effacing way he called it 'the nut house'. When *The Memoirs* was screened in Britain, the man who was Sherlock Holmes failed to see his own last series because he was in a ward where the other patients preferred to watch another station. Jeremy Brett deferred to their choice of viewing.

Twelve

The Lady in the Case

IT IS TRUE TO SAY THAT Jeremy Brett could not have staggered through the last Sherlock Holmes series if he had not had the help of one special lady who had entered his life merely as a fan and gradually became a close friend and nurse. Linda Pritchard was this lady, a diminutive Londoner with fierce determination and a spirit of steel. She cared for and nursed Jeremy devotedly in the last few years of his life as his health slowly, but inexorably, deteriorated.

Paradoxically, their relationship began with Jeremy offering to help and support her. Linda's story of her involvement with Jeremy Brett is a moving one, and indicative of how the aristocratic, worldly-wise thespian always made himself available to others. He once said that, as a public figure, he felt it his responsibility to speak to the man in the bus queue and to be nice to the lady in the greengrocer's. His first contact with Linda Pritchard began in similar circumstances. She had seen him on television as Holmes and became fascinated by the man behind the performance. Her ambition to meet her hero was realised on 12 September 1988. At that time Linda was planning to run around Great Britain in an attempt to raise money for cancer research, and she had written to Jeremy asking for a signed photograph to take with her on the run. He was appearing in *The Secret of Sherlock Holmes* in Richmond at the time and invited her backstage. It was the start of a seemingly unlikely friendship.

Linda recalls this first meeting vividly:

'After handing me the signed photograph, we talked a long time about his career, my intended quest to raise money for cancer research and my need to help a worthy cause. Jeremy told me about the loss of his second wife, Joan Wilson Sullivan, to cancer on July 4th, 1985. He told me that he had never given up hoping: "there are success stories and there are miracles and one always thinks you're the one who is going to get away with it. Even right up to the very last minute there are cases of people who do. But what I think is extraordinary is that the human spirit is so strong, that one doesn't give up hope until the very end. The hardest thing about being left behind is that you're left to pick up the pieces. You try and carry on as normally as possible, but very often it's not possible, so one has to give oneself a lot of space, a lot of sitting still and a lot of praying, to come to terms with all the resentment one sometimes feels. One experiences anger—anger that it should happen to the person you love so much. All this has to be released and let go—and that takes time. It isn't a comfortable journey. Some never get over it. I don't think one ever quite gets over it:

one gets used to it. So be prepared to cry and let it all out. Don't be too brave. Bravery is a fine thing on some occasions, but sometimes it can be quite a dangerous thing. The stiff upper lip is not always the best."

It is obvious that Jeremy was touched by this young woman's strong need to help those suffering from the disease which had brought an end to the life of his Joanie. There was within him always a strong streak of unselfishness, a keen desire to help others. In Linda and her quest, I believe he saw something clear and tangible into which he could channel this desire. Linda Pritchard's run, called 'Keep Hope Alive', began from Greenwich in south-east London on 12 April 1989. Jeremy Brett was there to see her off. In the intervening months since their first meeting, he had been an enormous help to Linda in setting up and supporting this venture: 'He gained publicity for me for a back-up driver and vehicle and he helped raise money for running shoes.'

Jeremy had recently won the title 'Pipe Smoker of the Year' and he donated his prize of £3000 to the run.

'The Keep Hope Alive' marathon was a gruelling and testing time for Linda.

"The 5000 mile run took over six months to complete. During the journey a number of inevitable problems occurred which tested my resolve to the limit. Injury, ill health to my back-up driver, atrocious weather conditions and a lack of accommodation to name but a few. However, Jeremy somehow always knew when I needed help and encouragement. It was like he had a telepathic link to my feelings. I will never forget when I was at my lowest ebb after completing 3000 miles and with hardly any money raised, he telephoned me and before I uttered one word about the problems I was having, he told me what I needed to hear: "Remember what you are doing is right. Sometimes our hopes and dreams do not go the way we planned, but we must never let despair overcome us. We have to try and we have to care. We must never give up when we still have something to give. Nothing is really over until the moment we stop trying. You will succeed in the end of that I am sure."

This stirring speech worked. Linda resolved to carry on. And, as Jeremy predicted, the run turned out to be a great success, raising £50,000 for cancer research. What now? thought Linda. With the venture over, surely it would be time for her to slip back into the shadows of everyday life and leave Jeremy shimmering in the spotlight. She admitted to me that their two lives and backgrounds were worlds apart:

"But I need not have worried about losing contact with Jeremy. We continued to see each other, often meeting for a coffee at a small cafe called Tea Time in Clapham

Common near to Jeremy's home. Some days we would be the first customers to arrive and the last to leave. We met at least once a week until late 1992 when I heard Jeremy was ill in hospital with manic depression. From that moment on our lives became entwined in a battle against his ill health.'

Before Linda met Jeremy Brett she had never even heard of manic depression, let alone understood the nature of the illness, but now she set out with determination on another marathon: not a running one this time, but a quest to learn as much as she could about manic depression—its symptoms and the signs of the disorder. She soon discovered there was a severe lack of understanding about the condition: 'Even Jeremy's General Practitioner at the time had the idea that anyone who suffered from manic depression brought it upon themselves and should simply, in the time-honoured admonition of the ignorant, pull themselves together!'

Sadly, Jeremy himself, while suffering from the curse of manic depression, also had little understanding of the illness. With Linda's help, a great deal of patience, and a new doctor, he learned more about the nature of the beast which, in Linda's words, 'allowed him the luxury of having less severe episodes'. One must remember that while all this was happening, Jeremy was still forced to put on a public face, for after all he was an actor, a public figure—public property. This in itself placed greater pressure on him.

During this period, Linda's relationship with her hero grew stronger, along with her respect for his courage:

'Caring for Jeremy made me realise the enormous effort it took a sufferer to recover from a manic depressive episode. One's self confidence is shattered and life is never quite the same again. Yet time and time again I saw Jeremy pick himself up and face the illness with more courage than anyone could possibly imagine. He was one of the bravest people I have ever met and I have met many brave people in my time. During my run around Great Britain, I visited cancer wards and hospices and encountered many cancer victims who faced the disease with incredible fortitude. At that time I felt I would never see courage like that again. But I was wrong. Jeremy battled through a cruel and devastating illness and when the illness became almost impossible to bear, he put out his hand and comforted those who suffered too. He was an inspiration to me and a beacon of light to other sufferers and I continually thank the workings of fate that brought us together.'

It was not only Linda who thanked fate for bringing her into Jeremy's life. Friends and the production team at Granada were thankful, too, that there was someone there for him, to minister to and care for this man

crippled by two devastating illnesses, which attacked the twin essences of the body: the heart and the mind.

Linda remembers this period with warm feelings:

'Whenever Jeremy felt reasonably well, we would spend the evening together having dinner at one of the local restaurants in Clapham Common. Other evenings we would spend at home having a delicious meal cooked by Jeremy. I le loved cooking, pasta dishes being his forte. Watching television was another enjoyment of ours. We both enjoyed nature programmes and ^x sport. Jeremy's favourites were horse events, while I loved football. In Jeremy's case, one programme that took precedence above all others was opera. If there wasn't anything interesting on television, we would spend our time puzzling over crosswords. This was something I introduced into Jeremy's life when he was having difficulty coping with the rapid flow of ideas that pervaded his mind during a manic depressive episode. I surmised that if he could concentrate on one particular subject for a period of time, then the rapid flow of ideas would subside a little, helping him to cope with the illness more easily. As we found later, this proved to be the case.'

When Jeremy Brett collapsed at the end of filming 'The Dying Detective' in 1993 and ended up in Charters Nightingale Hospital, producer June Wyndham Davies faced the prospect of having to pull the plug on the whole series. She knew how ill her star was and how he needed full-time personal care to coax him back to the kind of health that would allow him to work again. Edward Hardwicke told me of a conversation he had with June around this time:

'We said, "God, who can we think of to go to that great big apartment in Clapham and live there and look after him?" I mean there was that roof garden. It's perilously high with some little railings. I thought one night Jeremy will go up there and be off the roof into the ether. So we cudgelled our brains as to who we could ask to take on this onerous task. But Linda, like an angel, was already in there doing the job—caring for Jeremy. And she made a particular speciality of learning absolutely everything there was to know about the medication. She read books about it so that when the doctors prescribed certain things she said no, no you can't give him that because he's taking this. She was remarkable in being around and being there for him.'

Linda Pritchard was caring for Jeremy Brett right up to the end. But we haven't quite reached the end yet.

Thirteen

Dancing in the Moonlight

IN OCTOBER 1993, Kevin Jackson wrote a stunning piece in *The Independent* newspaper regarding Jeremy Brett's portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. Under the heading 'Underrated', with a stylish sub-heading of 'A Jigger of Remorse, a Dash of Lunacy', he wrote:

It might seem perverse to suggest that Jeremy Brett's portrayals of Sherlock Holmes are in any way underrated: the Granada series has, after all, proved immensely popular not just in Britain but in more than 70 countries (*it's huge* in Japan) and reviewers regularly commend its leading players, its high production values, strong supporting casts, atmospheric scores and so on. Moreover, only die-hard Basil Rathbone fans will resist the proposition that Brett makes a fine Detective and Edward Hardwicke an engaging Dr Watson.

But even the most wide-spread acclaim can still be insufficient if it does not try to address its object, and popularity is not quite the same thing as recognition. The case of Mr Brett is a little like the case of the purloined letter in Poe's yarn, a filched letter was overlooked precisely because the villain had not hidden it at all. Similarly, Mr Brett's true brilliance is overlooked not because someone says that he is splendid but because everybody does.

What Brett offers is a combination of fidelity and audacity. Everything he does can ultimately be justified by chapter and line from Conan Doyle's stories, but he has taken liberties with the myth so confidently that he has also, over the last decade, taken possession of it and displaced the literary Holmes.

Brett's is a richly comic performance. His Holmes is composed of sudden wild stares, dreamy vacancies, hoarse exclamations, dulcet murmurs which wilt into silence. He holds his body stiffly yet languorously, like an opium eater who has held a commission in the Guard's and his accent is patrician enough to make Sir Kenneth Clark sound like Danny Baker. Into this potent brew go a jigger of remorse, a dash of sheer lunacy and a strong whiff of camp—the camp is held firmly in check by sincerity.

So much is surface. A friend recalls a dull evening in Budapest, where he channel-hopped idly into an episode dubbed into Hungarian, and found himself beguiled even though he had only the dimmest idea of the plot. Beneath the amusing caricature, however, is one of the shrewdest interpretations of a popular myth ever filmed.

What other actors have represented in Holmes is the superbrain, the overgrown swot. What Mr Brett has given us for our own *fin de siècle* is a portrait of the Detective as a crazed aesthete. Conan Doyle did not only borrow the format of the detective story from Poe: he also took on board all the trappings of Poe's doomed anti-heroes, which is why Holmes is a drug addict, why he plays and composes wild music on his Stradivarius, why he dreads *ennui* and oscillates between lassitude and frenzy ...

Sherlock Holmes is the Roderick Usher of Baker Street, and Brett has captured his genius. Veteran theatregoers are fond of telling their juniors that they have missed the definitive interpretations of Hamlet or Lear or Phedre. They may be right, but at

least we can console ourselves that that one definitive role is very much alive. The Granada series is, we can confidently assert, an ideal Holmes exhibition.'

This erudite, eloquent and perceptive 'fan letter' expressed brilliantly what so many admirers of Jeremy Brett and the Granada series felt, and still feel. That word 'underrated' still applies. Edward Hardwicke is appalled by the lack of recognition for Jeremy Brett in one of Britain's most artistically and commercially successful ventures:

'Quite honestly, I think it's disgraceful that Jeremy never received an award for playing Holmes, especially in the first thirteen programmes. I suppose by the 'nineties the powers-that-be thought it was too late, but that shouldn't have been the case. Esther Dean, who worked on the costumes for the series, was a member of BAFTA and kept putting Jeremy's name forward for an award but her suggestion was ignored. In the end she resigned.'

Similarly, Simon Williams, of *The Eligible Bachelor* notoriety, observed:

'It's disgraceful that this shining performance, this definitive Sherlock Holmes of Jeremy Brett's, went without any acknowledgement at all in the honours system. It makes the whole thing meaningless to me. Here was a performance that was the biggest programme that Granada ever had. A huge exporter for Britain; an actor who had this ten-year triumph and he never got rewarded. It is a disgrace.'

Disgrace—the word that both actors use to express their anger at the lack of recognition for Brett's shining hour as Holmes. It is an anger and dismay felt by colleagues on the Granada production team as well as the many, many fans world-wide who revere both the programme and his performance.

Although he never showed any resentment or hurt, it must have pained Jeremy Brett that there had been no tangible Establishment accolades. God knows, daily he received drawings of himself as Holmes, cards of himself as Holmes, dolls of himself as Holmes (most of which were execrable) from the fans, but it is not the same to an actor as receiving a BAFTA or similar gong. I remember the joy he exhibited on receiving a fan letter from Douglas Fairbanks Jr which said: 'I have only just realised that the lithe and handsome fellow who sang to dear Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* is the brilliant Sherlock Holmes of our television screens.' He showed me this letter with the gladsome joy of a schoolboy. He was proud that a Hollywood veteran was praising him. Actors need applause. In the theatre it is the

natural end to the performance. For the television performer, there are just the critics and the fans—often poles apart—unless there is some other kind of formal recognition. Sadly, Jeremy Brett never received that.

In the last year of his life, Jeremy fronted a documentary about the restoration of the 1964 movie *My Fair Lady* in which he appeared as Freddie Eynsford-Hill. He also made a dreadful little movie called *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*. 'I was the mad one to do it,' he told me, 'but I wanted to show the world that I was still alive and I could do other things apart from Sherlock Holmes. I hope they don't release it.' They did. Luckily for all concerned it sank with barely a ripple. Critics damned it but most were kind about Brett's fleeting appearance. If you see it on the shelves of your video store—leave it there.

Jeremy also did one day's filming in Ireland on a film version of *Moll Flanders*. It was a 'cough and spit', as actors term it, and a far cry from the centre-of-attention roles that he had been playing for most of his career.

I last saw Jeremy Brett in February 1995. He was very low. He had just learned that there was no way his heart condition could be stabilised. Drugs would help but it was a deterioration process. 'It's called cardiomyopathy — the slow disintegration of the heart—and it's inoperable. The only cure is a heart transplant—and that's too dramatic even for me.' He managed a wry smile for the punchline and then the face slipped back into a sad mask. He was understandably distraught. Even if he felt well enough to work, he could never secure insurance for film, television or stage work again. For any actor of his power, charisma and talent to know that essentially his career is over is a devastating blow.

Struggling with his own dark inner feelings, Jeremy tried to be positive on that gloomy February day. He smiled again; the Brett smile, wide, infectious, one that lit up the eyes and warmed the features: 'I'll not be able to jump over the sofa again like I did in "The Red-Headed League".' The voice was empty of any emotion.

He was sweating profusely—'a side effect of my condition'—and sucked on ice lollipops partly to try and keep his temperature down and partly to keep his hand from straying towards the cigarette packet. (Later the power of the weed overtook him and shortly before his death he was up to thirty cigarettes a day: 'I am so ashamed of myself. But I can't help it. I don't go out in case people see me smoking in the street.'))

This last meeting with Jeremy was an unhappy one. He would begin a story and then somehow, like a cloud trailing across the sun, the sadness would strike him and he would stop mid-sentence to stare far off and then after a moment come back to me. He grew angry that day, an anger born, I am sure, out of frustration at his condition. He said unkind things, things he did not mean: not about me, but about people he had worked with, people I knew he loved and cared for. When I returned home there were five messages on my answering machine, all from Jeremy, begging me to forgive him for his churlishness and to forget the unkind comments he had made. 'I wasn't myself.' Who could blame him for his rage? Not I. His comments were erased and forgotten.

When I left his apartment on that February day, I felt depressed and empty. It was as though Prospero had had his magic wrenched from him in a cruel and untimely fashion. There was so much this actor had yet to achieve. Now that Sherlock was finished—although he never closed the door on him: 'we could do a Christmas special in a couple of years' time if the script is right'—he could pick and choose. There were those great roles that had eluded him earlier. He had talked about resuming his classical career. But now there would be no golden opportunities; no first nights; no virtuoso performances; no applause. Now he had to turn down work because of his failing health, including playing Scrooge at the National Theatre with a script by John Mortimer, a season at Chichester, the Professor Higgins role in a revival of *My Fair Lady*, and a cameo appearance in a Whoopi Goldberg movie.

It was certainly a more cheerful Jeremy Brett who spoke to me on the telephone in April 1995. Basically, the health situation was the same but his spirits were high: 'I've been thinking, if I'm not going to star again, what a way to go out with Sherlock! I don't think I could have topped Sherlock.' I agreed and suggested that to this generation he was *the* Sherlock Holmes.

'Thank you for that, but all I know is that I had a crack at him. I never actually saw him, you know—he was always a few steps ahead and I never actually caught up with him. To be Sherlock is difficult because he is such an elusive pimpernel. Maybe I got one or two things right. But Sherlock is evergreen. He is one of the most elusive, intellectual geniuses who has ever been written about. Men find him fascinating because he is so self contained and totally in control, while women see him as a challenge: they want to break that icy demeanour and reveal the real

emotion beneath. Of course SH has a feminine side too—the intuitive quality which is part of his magic. Bless his heart, he's streets ahead of us still.'

This was a happier, upbeat Brett, still content to analyse the character of Sherlock Holmes. But in some ways his renewed cheerfulness had a poignant edge to it because it underlined his resignation to a life with little work and no more demanding roles where he could swagger, sparkle, and scintillate. I remembered what he had said to me the last time we saw each other:

'The only thing I do have in common with Sherlock Holmes is a kind of enthusiasm: mine is for life, his is for work. He's dead when he's not working—in that sense he is like an actor. But I've had a fascinating time playing him. I said to Dame Jean that I've danced in the moonlight with your father for ten years. The moonlight, not the sunlight—Holmes is a very dark character.'

He had been dancing in the moonlight for us; occasionally slipping into those dark crevices where no light pervades but always pirouetting out again under the silver beams to enchant and delight his audience.

The dancing finally stopped on Tuesday 12 September 1995, when Jeremy Brett died peacefully in his sleep.

The moonlight will never be quite the same again.

Fourteen

Leave'em Laughing

I DID NOT WANT TO END this book with the death of Jeremy Brett. It would be too depressing a finale for a man who had such a fierce passion and a verve for life—a man who so enjoyed laughing and creating laughter. In his speech at Jeremy's Memorial Service, held at St Martin in the Fields on 29 November 1995, Edward Hardwicke said, 'whenever I think of Jeremy, I think of him laughing—and I can't pay him a greater tribute than that'. So I believe it is fitting that I bring to a close this account of Jeremy Brett and his involvement with Sherlock Holmes with a selection of anecdotes in which laughter is predominant.

Edward Hardwicke recalled that on his first day as Doctor Watson, Jeremy had eyed him up carefully and observed, 'I think you need more hair, dear heart. And I think you should wear lifts.' It was at that moment, Hardwicke noted, that he knew he was playing 'the Ernie Wise part'.¹⁷

After struggling with lifts for a day and resembling someone walking into a gale, rather like Jacques Tati's M. Hulot, Hardwicke abandoned them to stand on his own two feet; but the hair stayed throughout the series—a wig to which Brett referred affectionately as Roland Rat!

David Burke illustrated Jeremy's wicked sense of humour in this story about the casting of Professor Moriarty in 'The Final Problem':

'He came into my dressing room and said, "You'll never guess who's going to play Professor Moriarty". I tried several guesses, but Jeremy shook his head. "You won't believe it," he said.

"Well, try me."

"Joan Plowright."

"Come on Jeremy," I said, "you're joking."

"No. You know her brother is Managing Director of Granada Television. We asked [Sir Laurence] Olivier if he would play Moriarty. Unfortunately he's too busy, but they've asked Joanie [Olivier's wife] and she's going to lose three stone—and she's going to play it."

"Well, I suppose it's possible."

"Oh, yes," cried Jeremy, "it's perfectly possible: she can lose three stone."

"I didn't quite mean that."

"Then I got to thinking and I said, "Well, there was that French actress in the nineteenth century who played Hamlet, and Vanessa Redgrave has played male parts."

'I was really trying to come to terms with the idea of Joan Plowright as Moriarty when Jeremy asked, "Do you know what the date is today, David?"

""No."

""It's April the first. April the first is April Fools' Day," he grinned wickedly, and then I hit him over the head.'

One incident that David Burke recounted brought the house down at The Northern Musgraves' Jeremy Brett Memorial Lunch. It is a tale that reveals not only Brett's humour and eccentricity, but also his endearing, self-effacing qualities:

'Jeremy said to me on one occasion, "I was feeling so low the other day that I sent myself a fan letter."

""Are you serious?"

""I'm absolutely serious."

""What did you write to yourself?"

""Dear Jeremy, I would just like to say what a wonderful actor you are. Your Sherlock Holmes puts every other attempt at the part in the -shade. Basil Rathbone is not fit to clean your boots; and Douglas Wilmer and Robert Stephens should beg you to give them lessons. You're much prettier than all of them, for a start. There is only one word for your performance—magic. Please send me a signed photograph. Yours, Joe Bloggs. P.S. I've heard that you're a really nice person, too."

""Did you really write that?"

""Yes, I did."

""Did you send it?"

""Yes. I put a first-class stamp on it. I wanted to get it as soon as possible. It came the next morning."

""And did you read it?"

""Of course I read it. I read it a dozen times. I felt wonderful afterwards."

""Well, did you send yourself a signed photograph?"

""David, I may be mad—but I'm not barking mad! In any case, the bugger didn't send a stamped addressed envelope!""

Jeremy Brett's impish sense of the ridiculous is further exemplified in this Burke anecdote:

'We were travelling back to London on the train after a Sherlock shoot. We were sitting in a railway compartment with this sweet old lady. We got chatting with her and she asked us what we did. Before I could open my mouth, Jeremy announced, "We're dentists!" She was quite intrigued by this—in fact, I suspect she was probably more intrigued by that than if we'd said we were Holmes and Watson.

""Oh!" she said, "Which of you is the anaesthetist?"

""I beg your pardon?" I asked.

""Well, which of you puts people to sleep?"

'We both said, "*Him!*"'

So many of his friends make mention of Jeremy's irresistible urge to sing, to serenade them, especially in restaurants! Actress friend Penelope Keith has memories of these serenading sessions. So has David Burke:

'We were on location somewhere and he serenaded me at a restaurant table in the middle of a very crowded restaurant in the evening . . . and when he serenaded me, he really did serenade me. He wasn't taking the mickey, it was absolutely serious as only Jeremy could be serious in a situation like that. I was sitting there, and suddenly his voice was floating out all over this restaurant, and he improvised this song all about me and my beautiful wife and my beautiful son. I was absolutely crimson with embarrassment. But it didn't make me love him any the less.'

Denis Quilley remembered a memorable song session while on location for 'The Devil's Foot':

'After a day's shooting, we sat in this small private hotel in Cornwall singing our way through the score of *A Most Happy Fella*. "Joe-ey! Jo-ey!" we crooned into each other's eyes. The other diners, who tended towards the elderly and respectable, stopped in mid-mouthful. June Wyndham Davies was sitting at the same table trying pathetically to pretend she wasn't with us. When we finished, instead of receiving rapturous applause as we would have done in a black-and-white Frank Capra movie, there was stunned silence. Jeremy whispered in my ear, "I think we've just lost the contract."

Penelope Keith recalled the fun of many Christmases spent in Jeremy's company:

'There was one Christmas in particular when Jeremy had organised a treasure hunt around the house. On Christmas Eve thirty or forty grown men and women searched for a collection of mundane household objects. For example, there was a nail in a chandelier and a toothbrush in an arrangement of dried flowers. While all this feverish activity was going on, Jeremy stood in the middle of the room with a glass of champagne in one hand and a big smile on his face, refusing to tell us where he had hidden the lavatory brush.'

Jeremy Brett always had the ability to laugh at himself as this story he told to Edward Hardwicke clearly reveals:

'I was walking across Clapham Common and saw this young policeman. I had heard on the radio the previous evening that the Home Secretary promised that he was going to put more policemen on the beat. I stopped this young bobby and said, "Dear heart, I just have to tell you how thrilled I am that there will be more of your like all around us. It's so reassuring to think that when we are in our beds at night—thunder and lightning— burglars, all around us—that there are more of you dear fellows, in your wonderful uniforms, outside, guarding us.'" And this young policeman looked at me and said, "Why don't you piss off?"'

There were great guffaws of laughter from Brett as he told the story; and when Jeremy Brett laughed it was a loud and lusty roar. With that in mind, here is a memory from Edward Hardwicke, one which he cherishes:

'Jeremy's favourite outfit in which one usually found him was a black cashmere sweater and white cotton trousers. One day I was arriving at the studio and Jeremy was getting out of a taxi. As he leant forward to pay the cabby, the waistband of this particular much-laundered pair of white cotton trousers parted company with the legs, which fell to the floor. Jeremy then struggled into Wardrobe where his laughter could have been heard in Liverpool. Whenever I think of him—I think of him laughing. I cannot pay him a greater compliment than that.'

Someone once said that no one ever leaves us as long as they are remembered. Jeremy Brett will be remembered, along with the pleasure, the excitement, and the laughter he brought to us all.

Afterword

IT IS NOW SEVEN YEARS since Jeremy Brett died. For those who met him, and the ardent fans who fell in love not only with his Holmes, but with the man himself, he is never far from our thoughts; and the Granada shows are played regularly on our video recorders. But has the perception of the man, the series, and his Sherlock Holmes changed in those intervening years? The answer has to be yes—certainly for me, it has.

It is now possible to stand back a little, and to apply some objectivity to my observations. The bulk of this book was written with passion in the days immediately following JB's death. The previous five years or so had been heady ones for me. Visiting the various sets and locations for the series, meeting up with Jeremy in his Winnebagos and dressing-rooms, and even being entertained by him in his Clapham penthouse was wonderful for a Sherlockian writer. Jeremy loved to talk, and he loved to talk about Sherlock. For me that was fascinating and I miss it—but less so now than I did in 1996.

After the first edition of *Bending the Willow* was published, I was accused by a few readers of failing to address the question of JB's sexuality. Well, as I intimated in Chapter One, I did not see that as part of my brief. I was not writing a biography or an exposé, I was writing about a talented actor's interpretation of a classic literary character. But I have been taken to task since for avoiding the sexuality question which would, I was told, have had some bearing on the way JB played Holmes. I don't really think so. All that kind of baggage would have been left in his dressing-room. To be honest, we never touched upon this topic in our discussions. I suspect that, if I had raised the question, I would have been shown the door with some speed; and quite right, too. However, for what it is worth, it seemed to me that Jeremy's affections were boundless and without sexual barriers. I saw him embrace and kiss men, women, and children with the same physical and emotional warmth and generosity. He even addressed me as 'darling' on more than one occasion. To some extent, this is an actor's way. It was certainly Jeremy's way. It may seem strange for me to say this, but I didn't and don't think of him as a sexual creature: he was too bold, open, and

warm for that. And whether his lovers were male, female, or both, I am sure that he would have treated them with the same care and warmth. He was easily touched. On our last meeting in Clapham, he showed me a letter that he had received that morning. It was a fan letter . . . from the actor Douglas Fairbanks, Jnr. I still remember some choice phrases from the letter. Fairbanks said, 'At first I did not realise that that brilliant Sherlock Holmes on our television screen was the same blithe boy who charmed us as Freddy Eynsford Hill in *My Fair Lady* . . .' JB was moist-eyed as he waved the letter in the air. He was like child who had received the most wonderful Christmas present.

It was this all-embracing sensitivity, rather than his specific sexuality, which helped him as an actor and also made him so vulnerable to emotional upset. When his wife Joan died, it all but destroyed him. Unlike Holmes, he could not excise the pain by mental superiority.

Looking back now I see that in agreeing to take on that final series, *The Memoirs*, Jeremy did it not for money, not for Sherlock Holmes, but out of fear. He knew how ill he was, and he was no longer functioning properly as an actor. As he explained to me on the set of 'The Three Gables', because of his heart complaint and the ruinous effects the drugs were having on his constitution, he couldn't move as easily as he should. ('I waddled,' he said.) He was also short of breath, and not only was he unable to exert himself in performance, he often did not have sufficient air for volume and, particularly, clarity. Listen carefully to his speeches in this series: they begin on a high note, almost a wailing, as though he has stored up enough air to get the words out, which are spoken at speed for the same reason. He would often sound chesty, and sometimes had to punctuate his delivery in an erratic fashion in order to take in air for the next phrase.

He drove himself hard in that final series because he feared, and feared correctly, that this was the last time he would act on television. For some strange reason, that series with its weak scripts and the lumbering performance from JB is more vividly etched in my mind than the sublime earlier shows; and I think it has coloured my view of how I now perceive Jeremy Brett—not Jeremy Brett the man, but as an actor and, more particularly, Jeremy Brett as Holmes.

Thankfully, something happened at the end of 2001 which helped bring me round and prompted this Afterword to the new edition of *Bending the*

Willow. In time for Christmas, I received a preview videotape for a forthcoming release from the BBC featuring a 1976 production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The play starred Peter Firth as Dorian, Sir John Gielgud as Lord Henry Wotton, and Jeremy Brett as Basil Hallward, the artist who paints Dorian's mystical portrait. It must have been a strange experience for JB to return to this piece thirteen years after playing the title role—no longer the beautiful young man who never ages, but rather the troubled painter. However, it is a better part and, as Hallward, JB gives a splendid, naturalistic interpretation of the role: not an easy task when playing a Wilde character and acting, for most of the time, with John Gielgud. Odd as it may seem, JB's performance reminded me what a remarkably fine actor he was; and, I think, I did need reminding. Those final grim and tortured performances in *The Memoirs* did much to blot from one's mind Brett's brilliance as an actor. His portrayal of Hallward came from the heart, from the soul, without any of the mannerisms and tics that he later developed when playing Holmes.

And this is because JB was a 'becomer'—a phrase he used in my presence on more than one occasion. Of course he employed an actor's technique in playing parts, but he overlaid these with a realism which stemmed from him becoming—*being*—the character. Such an approach to a part results in wonderful fidelity, but also can take its toll on the actor's psyche—particularly if the character being played is diametrically opposed to one's own. To be a 'becomer', an actor must restrain and sublimate his own emotions and characteristics and live those of the person he is playing. Consider it: flamboyant, extrovert, generous, garrulous Jeremy Brett chained to the character of Sherlock Holmes as he perceived him—cold, dark, solitary, misogynistic, a man of controlled emotions. No wonder that from time to time JB said he no longer wanted to play the character.

It is nearly ten years since the Granada series finished, and nearly twenty since it began. Distance grants one clarity of vision. The view through the telescope of time is sharper because it is more objective. Looking at the episodes again, time has allowed me to see more clearly than I had before how Jeremy's interpretation of Holmes was part technique and part his aim to be a becomer—and partly the conflict within himself between the Holmes character and his own. Those flourishes—the whirling arms, the raucous cries, the leaps over furniture, the jumps in the air with

elation—are all moments where Jeremy's character breaks out of the straitjacket of Holmes to express itself—and the flourishes worked miraculously in the early days of the series. It was as though he was not so much adding to Doyle's character, but, rather, exposing more of it—aspects that were always there but never demonstrated before by other actors. And, for all I know, he was right. With the careful handling by scriptwriters and directors, this newly rounded Holmes was a revelation, and was the core of the success of the programmes.

However, as is charted in this book, JB's failing health, both mental and physical, combined with less scrupulous directors and writers—themselves struggling with increasingly thin material—allowed more of the Jeremy character to break through, pushing the real Holmes into the background. All actors who are stuck with playing one part for a long time, whether it be on stage or television, strive to find fresh corners to illuminate, new ways of presentation: partly to stave off boredom, but partly, in Jeremy's case at least, to discover more about the character that he was playing. However—and here is where I tread the heretics' path and upset the Sherlockian community—there isn't very much to Sherlock Holmes other than what Conan Doyle tells us. In simple terms, he is little more than a mixture of conjuring tricks, quaint props, outré habits, and a penchant for the quotable axiom. The rest is what we and our imagination give the character. So JB invented, introducing little behaviours to round out his portrait. Initially these worked well; but, as time went on, he brought in more mannerisms and tics which were unsuitably extravagant, showy, and melodramatic. He was not well enough to see that these had little or nothing to do with Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes would not have stubbed his cigarette out in a breakfast egg; he would not have rushed out in the rain in his nightshirt to pick up a clue; he would not have shouted at Mrs Hudson. But to Jeremy Brett, he would. And he did.

In his relaxed moments JB was fond of telling me how different he was from Sherlock Holmes; but as time went on that difference diminished because, gradually, there was more of Jeremy Brett leaking into his portrayal of Holmes. This pleased the most ardent of his fans, particularly the women, who saw Holmes and Brett as one—as a dark, almost unattainable (it had to be almost), romantic creature. In the end, however, rather like Dorian Gray, it destroyed the beauty of his early days. The

Sherlock Holmes we see shouting up to Culverton Smith's window in 'The Dying Detective', or the Sherlock Holmes shedding a tear at the climax of 'The Red Circle', or the Sherlock Holmes being inexplicably rude to Professor Coram's housekeeper in 'The Golden Pince-Nez' is neither Conan Doyle's Holmes nor indeed the Holmes that Jeremy Brett conceived in the early days.

The images of *The Memoirs* did much to denigrate the series of Granada shows as a whole and Brett's own standing as a great Sherlock Holmes. None of the series has been repeated on terrestrial television in Britain, and so the newer Holmes fans have to seek for videos and DVDs to glimpse his greatness. In this eighth year since his death, I suspect that Jeremy Brett's position as one of the finest portrayers of Sherlock Holmes is slipping. Rathbone's seems to remain constant, and perhaps that is an indication of the power of film over television, which despite its age and sophistication is still seen as a transitory medium. Perhaps this falling away is a natural phenomenon and it must be that, as Holmes observes in *The Valley of Fear*, 'Everything comes in circles . . . The old wheel turns and the same spoke comes up.' Let us hope that there is a reassessment of the early days of Jeremy Brett's Holmes and that the new generation of Sherlockian fans is made aware of the riches available to it. I hope that the re-emergence of this book after being out of print for some years will help in some small measure with this renaissance.

One only has to see 'A Scandal in Bohemia', for example, to remember once more Brett's brilliance, and to be in the presence of one of the most charismatic interpreters of Sherlock Holmes there ever has been. Few have braved Baker Street since Jeremy left the rooms vacant. Matt Frewer is taking an ill-advised stab at the part in a series of Canadian productions for Hallmark; but all Frewer is doing is underlining once more how difficult it is to play Sherlock with fidelity, conviction, and panache. He comes nowhere near JB's shadow, let alone challenging his crown. I do not believe we shall see such a great Holmes as the one that Jeremy Brett gave us for many a long year; and so now it's time to re-cherish the great Jeremy.

DAVID STUART DAVIES
April 2002

Ah, yes, I remember it well...

A final afterword

AS TIME GOES BY, when one looks back on one's past experiences, they seem to have been lived by someone else. Or, at least, they do to me, especially when I cast my mind back to those heady days of the 1980s and early 1990s, that period when the Granada series of Sherlock Holmes films and Jeremy Brett in particular impinged on my life. I remember sitting down to watch the first televised episode of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and how excited I was before it began and how delighted I was after viewing it. Michael Cox and company had got it right and Jeremy Brett made a fascinating and charismatic Holmes. Little did I know then how much the series and Jeremy would become a part of my life. Recalling those occasions when I trekked off to various locations to watch the filming and interview JB, they seem dreamlike and unreal. But, despite them being magical, they were not dreams. They did happen.

As recorded in the main body of the text, I first met JB in March 1988—over twenty years ago, although it seems like yesterday. I was ushered into his Winnebago on the docks at Liverpool by a young, brisk PR girl who informed me that I had just ten minutes with the great man. I had the impression that I was merely tolerated by her. I was no one important, just one of the many fans of Jeremy who was allowed a brief audience. To be fair, my only 'credentials' then were that I was then Co-President of a small Holmes Society and Co-Editor of its publications. I had also been the author of *Holmes of the Movies* a decade earlier, a book which charted the Baker Street sleuth's film career. However once JB and I got talking and he could see that I knew my Holmes and I didn't have to be spoon-fed information about the *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the current production, the actor relaxed and chatted away merrily with me. I am sure it relieved his boredom in being able to talk about his part and the story they were filming. When the PR girl returned in the allotted ten minutes to whisk me away, JB waved his arms gently to dismiss her. 'We're all right,' he said and continued to talk to me. In the end I stayed nearly an hour. That meeting seemed to cement a kind of relationship between us. He knew I was a genuine and knowledgeable Sherlockian and not just a simpering fan.

It surprised me—no, shocked me—when a few weeks later I received a telephone call at home from him. I picked up the receiver and a voice said, 'Hello, it's Jeremy here . . .' Thank goodness, some guardian angel prevented me from responding with 'Jeremy who?' I certainly wasn't expecting the great man himself to ring me. He just wanted to add some comments to our conversation about *The Hound*. That kind, impulsive gesture and care about the production was the essence of the man. In five minutes he was gone, leaving me a little shell-shocked.

When I was interviewing him, sometimes I felt that he wasn't always listening to me. His eyes seemed vacant and his mind elsewhere but then on a later occasion he was able to repeat what I'd asked him or told him. I remember discussing the concept of the two hour Sherlocks when Granada had decided to go down this route. In those far off days it was a fairly new concept, pioneered by the Inspector Morse shows. I told him that when a Morse was on, I used to clear my diary for the evening, sit down with some choice nibbles and a bottle of wine and give myself up to the Oxford mystery completely for two hours. It was a pleasant indulgence. I felt sure that others would enjoy the two hour Holmes shows in the same fashion. At the time JB did not seem terribly impressed or interested in my notion. However several months later at a press conference which I attended someone asked him how he felt about moving from an hour long slot to a two hour one. He grinned and thrust his arm in my direction. 'I'm sure a lot of viewers will be like my friend David and settle down with a bottle of wine and something to nibble while they enjoy the show.' He'd taken notice and remembered. I nodded graciously.

It is true that I never knew Jeremy before his health—both physical and mental—began to deteriorate; but I was able to observe his sad decline. As a result of the bipolar condition both his views on the stories and his performances grew erratic. His opinions varied almost daily: he loved the two hour shows; he hated the two hour shows. He thought the nightshirt scene in *The Eligible Bachelor* was fascinating; he knew he should never have done it. The iron will that had kept him on the Doyle straight and narrow wilted. I see now that it was cruel to keep him at it. He wasn't well and he rather became Granada's puppet towards the end when he had neither the fight nor the clarity of vision necessary to keep the character on song.

On good days, he was an absolute delight to be with and talk to. However, his love of the character of Holmes vacillated. After his wife died and the bi-polar darkness descended, he grew to hate Sherlock, seeing the self-contained and self-righteous detective as a straitjacket, suffocating his own natural ebullience and racing emotions. Illness or not, this was true. In reality he was much nearer in attitude and character to Watson than the aesthetic and icy Holmes; but towards the end of his life he had grown to love the old fellow. He had inhabited his skin long enough to come to terms with his foibles, inconsistencies and his lack of emotion. Jeremy called him 'an elusive pimpernel' in his last conversation with me and added, 'Bless his heart, he's streets ahead of us still.' Terms that could be applied to JB himself.

When I wrote the Afterword for the second edition of this book in 2002, I said that I did not believe we would see such a great Sherlock Holmes on screen as the one that Jeremy Brett gave us for a long time. Nothing has happened in the intervening years to alter my opinion. In playing Sherlock Holmes JB not only won many fans for his acting ability but he also created a whole new army of enthusiasts for the character as well, I miss him. You miss him. And the world of Sherlock Holmes misses him. Praise be for film and the memory bank.

DAVID STUART DAVIES
September 2008

Appendix

Jeremy Brett's Performances as Sherlock Holmes

(I) The Granada Series

First series: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

A Scandal in Bohemia: First broadcast 24 April 1984

Dramatised by Alexander Baron; Directed by Paul Annett.

The Dancing Men: First broadcast 1 May 1984

Dramatised by Anthony Skene; Directed by John Bruce.

The Naval Treaty: First broadcast 8 May 1984

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Alan Grint.

The Solitary Cyclist: First broadcast 15 May 1984

Dramatised by Alan Plater; Directed by Paul Annett.

The Crooked Man: First broadcast 22 May 1984

Dramatised by Alfred Shaughnessy; Directed by Alan Grint.

The Speckled Band: First broadcast 29 May 1984

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by John Bruce.

The Blue Carbuncle: First broadcast 5 June 1984

Dramatised by Paul Finney; Directed by David Carson.

Second series: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

The Copper Beeches: First broadcast 25 August 1985

Dramatised by William Craig; Directed by Paul Annett.

The Greek Interpreter: First broadcast 1 September 1985

Dramatised by Derek Marlowe; Directed by Alan Grint.

The Norwood Builder: First broadcast 8 September 1985

Dramatised by Richard Harris; Directed by Ken Grieve.

The Resident Patient: First broadcast 15 September 1985

Dramatised by Derek Marlowe; Directed by David Carson.

The Red-Headed League: First broadcast 22 September 1985

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by John Bruce.

The Final Problem: First broadcast 29 September 1985

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by Alan Grint.

Third series: The Return of Sherlock Holmes

The Empty House: First broadcast 9 July 1986

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by Howard Baker.

The Priory School: First broadcast 16 July 1986

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by John Madden.

The Second Stain: First broadcast 23 July 1986

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by John Bruce.

The Musgrave Ritual: First broadcast 30 July 1986

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by David Carson.

The Abbey Grange: First broadcast 6 August 1986

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by Peter Hammond.

The Man with the Twisted Lip: First broadcast 13 August 1986

Dramatised by Alan Plater; Directed by Patrick Lau.

The Six Napoleons: First broadcast 20 August 1986

Dramatised by John Kane; Directed by David Carson.

First feature-length episode

The Sign of Four: First broadcast 29 December 1987

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by Peter Hammond.

Fourth series: The Return of Sherlock Holmes

The Devil's Foot: First broadcast 6 April 1988

Dramatised by Gary Hopkins; Directed by Ken Hannam.

Silver Blaze: First broadcast 13 April 1988

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by Brian Mills.

Wisteria Lodge: First broadcast 20 April 1988

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Peter Hammond.

The Bruce-Partington Plans: First broadcast 27 April 1988

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by John Gorrie.

Second feature-length episode

The Hound of the Baskervilles: First broadcast 31 August 1988

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by Brian Mills.

Fifth series: The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax: First broadcast 21 February 1991

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by John Madden.

The Problem of Thor Bridge: First broadcast 28 February 1991

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Michael Simpson.

Shoscombe Old Place: First broadcast 7 March 1991

Dramatised by Gary Hopkins; Directed by Patrick Lau.

The Boscombe Valley Mystery: First broadcast 14 March 1991

Dramatised by John Hawkesworth; Directed by June Howson.

The Illustrious Client: First broadcast 21 March 1991

Dramatised by Robin Chapman; Directed by Tim Sullivan.

The Creeping Man: First broadcast 28 March 1991

Dramatised by Robin Chapman; Directed by Tim Sullivan.

Third feature-length episode

The Master Blackmailer: First broadcast 2 January 1992

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Peter Hammond.

Short episode

Broadcast as Part One of Independent Television's *Telethon '92*

The Four Oaks Mystery: First broadcast 18 July 1992

Fourth feature-length episode

The Last Vampyre: First broadcast 27 January 1993

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Tim Sullivan.

Fifth feature-length episode

The Eligible Bachelor: First broadcast 3 February 1993

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by Peter Hammond.

Sixth series: The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

The Three Gables: First broadcast 7 March 1994

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Peter Hammond.

The Dying Detective: First broadcast 14 March 1994

Dramatised by T.R. Bowen; Directed by Sarah Hellings.

The Golden Pince-Nez: First broadcast 21 March 1994

Dramatised by Gary Hopkins; Directed by Peter Hammond.

The Red Circle: First broadcast 28 March 1994

Dramatised by Jeremy Paul; Directed by Sarah Hellings.

The Mazarin Stone: First broadcast 4 April 1994

Dramatised by Gary Hopkins; Directed by Peter Hammond.

The Cardboard Box: First broadcast 11 April 1994

Dramatised by William Humble; Directed by Sarah Hellings.

(II) The Secret of Sherlock Holmes

U.K. Theatre appearances

30 August-10 September 1988: Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

12 September-17 September 1988: The Richmond Theatre, Richmond,
Surrey

20 September-21 September 1988: Previews at Wyndham's Theatre,
London
22 September 1988-16 September 1989: Wyndham's Theatre, London
2 October-7 October 1989: Alhambra Theatre, Bradford
9 October-14 October 1989: Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon
16 October-21 October 1989: New Theatre, Hull
23 October-28 October 1989: Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford
30 October-4 November 1989: New Theatre, Cardiff
6 November-11 November 1989: Festival Theatre, Chichester
13 November-18 November 1989: Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham
20 November-25 November 1989: His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen
27 November-2 December 1989: Theatre Royal, Brighton
4 December-9 December 1989: Palace Theatre, Manchester
11 December-16 December 1989: Theatre Royal, Bath

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks to a band of individuals who, in many different ways, have been helpful to me in putting this book together. Firstly I would like to thank Paul Annett, Trevor Bowen, David Burke, Michael Cox, Edward Hardwicke, and Jeremy Paul for so generously giving of their time to talk to me about Jeremy Brett and the series. I am grateful to the late Richard Lancelyn Green for allowing me to plunder his collection of stills. Others who have provided help, pictures, support, and information, are John Addy, Catherine Cooke, June Wyndham Davies, Roger Johnson, Jessie Lilley, Linda Pritchard, R. Dixon Smith, Jean Upton, Richard Valley, Pat and Jim White, and Elizabeth Wiggins. I would also like to thank Barbara and Christopher Roden of Calabash Press for their support and advice. Finally, two very special people: Kathryn, who was and is always there for

me—she is always loving, skilful, and constructive in her advice; and dear Jeremy Brett for his time, his generosity, his laughter—and his Sherlock.

D.S.D.

Notes

[[← 1](#)]

* The artist who illustrated the Sherlock Holmes stories in *The Strand Magazine*. In essence, he was responsible for creating the image of the detective which is still potent today. It was Paget who, acting on Conan Doyle's reference to Holmes's travelling cap, drew the detective wearing a deerstalker. It was the intention of Michael Cox and Jeremy Brett to reproduce visual reminders of Paget's illustrations in the series, a feat they managed with remarkable fidelity in the first thirteen episodes.

[← 2]

An actor who later went on to portray Professor Moriarty in a dreadful TV movie, *Hands of a Murderer* (1990). Edward Woodward featured as a short, fat Holmes. John Hillerman was his dull, stiff, and starchy Watson.

[← 3]

A comment uttered by Holmes in *The Sign of Four* which is often quoted by those who are keen to prove that the detective was a misogynist.

[← 4]

Thorley Walters played Watson three times. He was much grounded in the Nigel Bruce huffing and puffing school of portrayal. In 1963 he appeared with Christopher Lee as Holmes in the German film *Sherlock Holmes und das Halsband des Todes* (*Sherlock Holmes and the Deadly Necklace*). He was glimpsed briefly in Gene Wilder's spoof *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975) with Douglas Wilmer as Holmes. In 1977 he repeated the role, to slightly better effect, in a short Anglia Television film of 'Silver Blaze'. His partner in this one was Christopher Plummer.

[← 5]

Bernard Fox played Watson to Stewart Granger's Holmes in the unintentionally hilarious TV movie of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1972). Apparently it was a pilot show—of the kamikaze kind!

[← 6]

Nigel Stock played Watson on television in the 'sixties. Initially he partnered Douglas Wilmer, then Peter Cushing. In general, he was a creditable Watson, but there were still elements of the humbling oaf about his portrayal. He later toured in a one-man show, *221B*, in the 'eighties. By then the actor had a line grasp of his characterisation, and gave a memorable performance as the good doctor.

[← 7]

British comedy actress famous for her award-winning role in *A Taste of Honey* (1961).

[← 8]

The Television Sherlock Holmes, published by W. H. Allen in 1986 and revised and reprinted by Virgin in 1991 and 1994.

[←9]

The actress was reunited with Brett in 1994 for his last outing as Holmes in 'The Cardboard Box'.

[← 10]

In 1928, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made a short film for Fox-Case Movietone. In the film he discussed various topics including Spiritualism and, inevitably, Sherlock Holmes. In a rather churlish manner he described Dr Watson as 'Holmes's rather stupid friend'—not a description which fits in with his original conception of the character or the spirit of his presentation in the sixty stories.

[← 11]

A classic French movie of 1955 which concerns a raid on a jewellery store and features a brilliant twenty-five minute silent robbery sequence.

[← 12]

Freddie Lonsdale's *Aren't We All* with Rex Harrison and Claudette Colbert.

[← 13]

Edward Hardwicke is the son of the celebrated actor Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who not only appeared to great acclaim on the London stage but also in many Hollywood movies. As a child Edward was taken to meet George Bernard Shaw, who advised him against a career as an actor. After all, the young Hardwicke was told, you will never be more than a famous actor's son. This thought stayed with Edward Hardwicke through a great deal of his career.

[← 14]

The notorious motorway which circles London, known for its frequent and lengthy traffic jams.

[← 15]

This is incorrect. All the BBC episodes in the 'sixties, with Wilmer and then Cushing in the role of Holmes, filled a fifty-minute slot in the schedule. Taking into account the commercial breaks, this is almost exactly the same length as the Granada episodes.

[← 16]

Sue was Jeremy's make-up artist, and was with him throughout the forty-one Granada films.

[← 17]

Ernie Wise was the diminutive partner to Eric Morecambe in the comedy double act Morecambe and Wise, who were very popular on British television during the 'seventies and early 'eighties. Morecambe always maintained that 'Little Ern' wore a wig, but you 'couldn't see the join'. Also, according to Morecambe, Wise had 'short, fat, hairy legs'.